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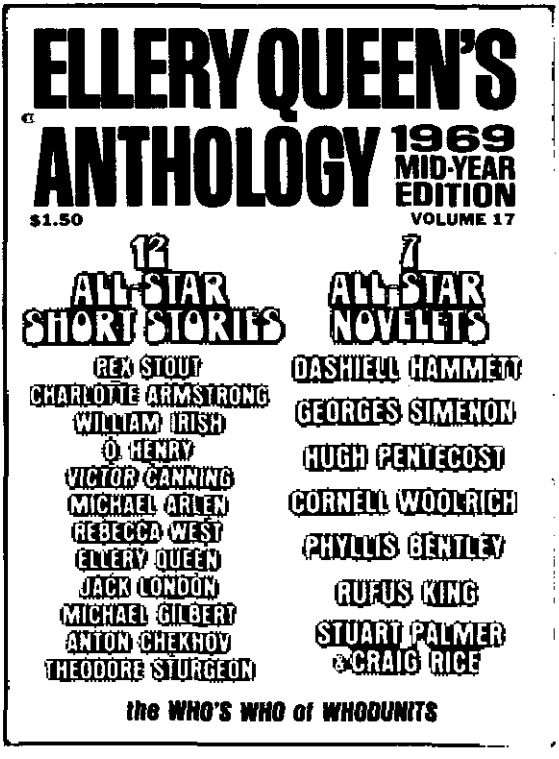

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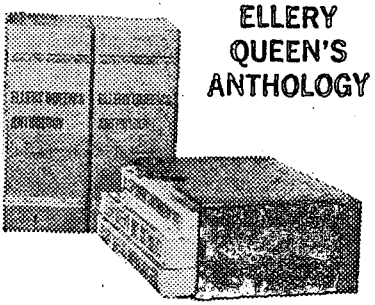

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the *NEWEST* Miss Phipps story by

PHYLLIS BENTLEY

Well, it had to happen—but the inevitability makes it all the more interesting ... Miss Marian Phipps, detective-story writer by vocation, detective by avocation (Marian and Ellery should team up!), has sold one of her stories to television, and the producing unit is filming the story on location—a wild, windy, damp and chilly moor at twilight. Naturally, Miss Phipps is present, to watch the proceedings; and naturally—or unnaturally—but judge for yourself ...

A note on terminology: we have not Americanized as many Anglicisms as we usually do; especially we have not changed the British TV-film technical terms. The British expression "shooting-stick" is self-explanatory in context, as is "clapper-boy." "Glazes" are probably what we call "filters." But we confess we have no clear idea what "dogsbodies" are ...

MISS PHIPPS AND THE NEST OF ILLUSION

by PHYLLIS BENTLEY

"NOW BE PASSIONATE!" SAID ONE of the technicians.

At this mock-serious command the whole company roared with laughter. Even Miss Marian Phipps, seated uncertainly on her shooting-stick, which she had installed near a few rough stones to keep her feet dry, chilled to the marrow by the moorland wind and disciplined to silence, could not forbear a snicker. A couple of young passers-by, hikers with knapsacks on their shoulders, colored and started, fearing that the laughter was directed toward them. Miss Phipps gave them a kindly smile, but they did not seem altogether reassured.

"But of course, poor pets, they

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haven't a clue to what it's all about. How could they? Even I, noted as I am for my succinct descriptions, my swift creation of atmosphere," mused Miss Phipps with a sardonic chuckle, "even I would require several pages to explain this setup."

In fact, this company of persons, which included director, camera crew, lighting crew, clapper-boy, actors male and female, wardrobe mistress, make-up girl, script girl, various secretaries, dogsbodies galore, five large blue trucks, cars to taste, and a long motor coach, comprised a film unit which was making a four-part television serial out of one of Miss Phipps's detective stories.

Uniformed policemen looking grave in order to conceal their real enjoyment patrolled the road at each end of this nest of illusion, halting cars whose occupants, at first vexed by the delay, presently grew so interested that they wouldn't move on. Fictitious policemen clustered round the coach, comparing their buttons with the real thing. Two St. John's First Aid men, one short and one tall, in uniform, and one female ditto, hovered in the background in case anyone suffered injury. For Miss Phipps's story required a murder to be committed in this wild moorland landscape, and however careful actors were with weapons and so on, accidents sometimes occurred.

It was not the first time that Miss Phipps had accompanied the group "on location," and she had got over her first astonishments. It did not surprise her now to find that she was no longer in command of her own characters; girls she had described as fair and silly turned up as dark and strong, while darkly elegant women in middle life appeared youthfully blonde. Her own dialogue was not always used, but she had seen the script and had grasped the probable reason for this; the script for today's shooting kept closely to her original story, and she guessed that this was because her dialogue was short and snappy. On the whole, however, she was well satisfied; the story line emerged clear and strong; there was no doubt that these young men knew what they were doing.

They were serious, they were dedicated, they were completely engrossed in their work. They rehearsed a dozen times, they rolled the heavy cameras here or there, nonchalantly putting down and moving heavy planks for the purpose, they altered a door or a light by an inch without a murmur, they repeated a comic moment without a smile. To the hordes of children who clustered round them in street scenes they behaved with a cool kindness which quelled.

Miss Phipps was indeed so much interested by them as a professional group that she had scarcely got

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around yet to her customary study of persons as individual characters. Perfectly courteous to her, as the author of the work in process of translation, they greeted her politely—"Good morning, Miss Phipps," "Nice to see you here," and so on; they gravely fetched cups of tea and coffee, sandwiches, biscuits, cake, for her from the interiors of the blue trucks; they politely indicated to her where she could or could not stand—"You'll be out of camera here," or "Just a yard this way"; they listened to her appraisals or criticisms of the shots just taken, without cutting her short, with attentively bent head and reserved smiles. But all without the least real interest or enthusiasm. In a word, they did not care two hoots what she thought because the story had become theirs; but they were obviously nice lads and wished to show this elderly author a proper respect. When they found that she unreservedly accepted these conditions of their association, the technicians became warmer—Miss Phipps never ventured to speak to the actors, who seemed to be regarded as a race apart.

Well, "never" was perhaps rather too strong a word; she had spoken to one of them on location the previous day. It was a scene in which a large number of extras had been required; in a small blue truck an official of some kind waited to pay them for their day's work. Miss Phipps, extremely tired of sitting on her shooting-stick, sank down on the step of this truck. Inside, exchanging a few words with the payer, was a young man whose swarthy complexion, smooth dark hair, and fiercely jutting nose gave him a decidedly sinister appearance.

"If you aren't playing my villain, you ought to be!" exclaimed Miss Phipps.

"Oh, I am," said the young man. He smiled, which improved his looks considerably. "This isn't quite my own nose," he continued with diffidence.

"It suits you," said Miss Phipps.

"It suits Verney," corrected the young man, naming the villain.

"That's what I meant," said Miss Phipps.

"It's a great part," said the young man with feeling. "I'm enjoying it. Quite a chance for me, really."

Miss Phipps was pleased. "You find Verney's motivation adequate," she said.

"Er—yes. How do you like having your story filmed?" said the young man, rather in a hurry, Miss Phipps realized, to get away from questions of motivation, which seemed unfamiliar to him.

"Very much. It's irritating at times, of course, to have one's characters and language altered," said Miss Phipps.

"Oh, I do think we should keep to the *script*," said the young man earnestly. "I mean, if you don't get

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your cues, where are you?"

"Where indeed?" agreed Miss Phipps, amused again by the difference between the author's point of view and the actor's. She decided not to upset his faith in the script by mentioning any of the changes.

At this point "Verney" was called for. "You can rely on *me* to speak your lines, Miss Phipps," the young man reassured her as he departed promptly.

Today called for Verney's big scene, the murder, and Miss Phipps looked forward to it with particular anticipation. The dialogue in the script was her own, word for word, and she couldn't help wondering how it would "play."

Delia and Roger, the main characters, had been filmed driving up the long steep hill in Roger's convertible; they parked at the side of the road and got out of the car. Roger attempted a love passage, but Delia, whose thoughts were not inclined that way (at any rate, not with Roger), stood gazing at the wild moorland landscape—the somber hills rolling away on every side into the clear evening sky, the rough tawny bents blowing in the relentless wind, the stretches of brown ling patching the long slopes, the row of shooting butts along a nearby edge, the shaggy sheep determinedly cropping here and there. This landscape was particularly dear, because native, to Miss Phipps, and she was pleased that the director had decided to film the most important incident where she had originally placed it.

"An unusual locale—it will give a certain freshness," he had said, smiling pleasantly, his long hair blowing in the wind.

He seemed never to feel cold, rain, fatigue, or hunger. Of course, he was clad from head to foot in the wool and leather devised by modern skill for style, ease of movement, and protection, with knee-high boots; but Miss Phipps thought his protection was mental rather than physical; he was so totally engrossed in "Never the First"—this was now the title of the film, quite different, of course, from Miss Phipps's title—that all other sensations passed him by.

Delia said something poetical about the moorland. Roger, a rather poor fish in the story, excellently acted as such by a lively blond young man, gave the rather innocuous reply which Miss Phipps had written for him. Or at least, she presumed that he did so; a microphone suspended overhead caught and recorded the words of Roger and Delia, but at this distance Miss Phipps did not hear them. She was accustomed by now to this "microphone voice," but hoped she had taken up a position sufficiently near to the site of the murder to hear all that went on there.

Delia now ran down a slope,

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sprang gracefully over a small stream, and made for a large flattish rock inclined against the face of a knoll from which there was a superb view of distant mountains and valleys. Thus far the action had been successfully filmed. Now Delia threw herself down on the rock, and then, clasping her hands about her knees, gazed out with keen enjoyment. Her rich dark hair and fine eyes, enhanced by long dark eyelashes, looked particularly beautiful.

Roger, following her devotedly, stumbled on a stone in the beck and splashed his ankles, drew out an elegant handkerchief and dried them; then he descended to the rock with uncertain steps, surveyed its damp surface with distaste, but finally sat down by Delia's side and put his arm round her. She laughed good-humoredly but pushed it away.

"They're both very good," approved Miss Phipps to herself.

Verney, in a long dark cloak and wide-brimmed hat, now sprang out from behind the knoll and with a cry of rage held a knife over the amorous Roger. The villain's hat, striking a rocky projection, fell off.

"No, no!" cried the director, rushing forward. "Your hat can't fall off. It would look comic."

"It's a wonder my head didn't fall off," said Verney, rubbing it ruefully. "That rock is sharp."

A long and dreary interval followed—dreary at least to Miss Phipps—while the director strove to rehearse the scene so as to convey the exact effect he wanted. Verney having entered three times and knocked his hat off or sideways each time, was instructed to enter from the other side of the knoll. But Delia was in his way there. Delia, who kept putting on yet another garment, for the wind was certainly piercing, obediently moved to the far side of the rock. Roger now objected; he disliked putting his right arm round a girl.

"It's unnatural," he said. "I mean, one needs one's right hand for other activities."

An appreciative titter from the company—the girls in their neat white boots quivering like butterflies—was sharply silenced by the chief cameraman, who announced gloomily, "The light's going."

The scene in the story required twilight, but of course one secured that, Miss Phipps knew, by glazes in the lens, not by reality. A frenzy of experiment and rehearsal followed, while vehicles and pedestrians were allowed to pass by.

Miss Phipps became bored, and directed her gaze to the oncoming sunset and to the lights which now began to twinkle in the little town far below in the valley. Occasional utterances reached her ears and recalled her attention.

"But it throws my nose away," lamented Verney, who now wore

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a stocking over his face. Miss Phipps agreed with him, and was glad to see him rush back to the dressing-room truck and emerge with his slouch hat replaced.

"This rock is hellishly cold," said Roger. "To sit on, I mean."

"No central heating here, my boy," said a technician.

"It really *is* cold," observed Delia mildly.

Roger sat down beside her gingerly, with a grimace. "Icy," he groaned.

"Now be passionate, lad," urged a technician in a kindly tone.

Everybody roared with laughter, and even Miss Phipps, though chilled to the marrow and extremely tired of sitting on her shooting-stick, could not forbear a snicker. A pair of youngsters passing by looked alarmed, and Miss Phipps gave them a reassuring smile.

At this point a pale thin young man wearing a police-uniform costume, with a peevish look and an excessive bush of golden hair over his eyes—an actor whom Miss Phipps had not much noticed before—suddenly rushed forward with a rug of artificial grass in his arms and threw it with a grand gesture on the rock. Miss Phipps slid off her shooting-stick at the sight, for anything more artificial, more phony, than this bright green nylon herbage against the dun moorland background, could hardly be imagined. She opened her mouth to speak, but this was not necessary; the director had already swooped down on the rock, snatched up the grass carpet, and flung it aside.

"I just thought it would make the rock warmer," said the young man in an injured tone.

The director gave him a smile. Possibly this was meant to be kindly, but its effect was tigerish; the young man, muttering in an angry tone, retreated. Glances were exchanged among the company, but nothing further was said, and everybody suddenly became extremely busy about something else. Miss Phipps resumed her uncomfortable perch on the shooting-stick and her appreciative gaze over the valley. After a few moments conversation rose again.

At length the road traffic ceased and a kind of hush descended on the company. Miss Phipps, turning to the scene of the action again, became aware that a shot was imminent. Delia quietly shed an overcoat, a scarf, and a sweater, and emerging in a very skimpy miniskirt which displayed her charming figure to perfection, sat down without murmur or grimace on the rock, which in the cool evening air looked even wetter, in exactly the same pose she had adopted before.

"A real actress," approved Miss Phipps.

"Is the blood in position?" inquired the director.

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Roger felt his bosom. "Blood okay," he said.

"Everyone quiet, please," boomed the loudspeaker.

The hush became absolute.

"Roll them."

"Shooting."

The clapper-board boy, standing in front of the camera, made the appropriate gesture, and said, "Episode Two. Incident Three. Take One."

A pause, then from the director: "Action!"

Roger put his arm round Delia in a thoroughly lecherous fashion. Delia laughed and pushed him away, but he bent to kiss her. The figure in the dark cloak and hat leaped round the knoll, and crying, "Drop dead!" drove his dagger at Roger's heart and vanished.

Delia screamed and rose in panic. Roger staggered to his feet; he clutched at his heart, blood spurted out of his shirt, his face seemed to blanch and distort into a look of hideous surprise; then he bent forward, swaying as if in agony.

"This may be corny, but it's frightfully effective," thought Miss Phipps, who had leaped to her feet and only just caught her shooting-stick in time to prevent it falling with a clatter to the stones.

Roger fell violently sideways. His weight knocked Delia off balance and she slipped from the rock into the stream below and lay motionless.

"Cut! Cut!" yelled the director, bounding forward in a fury. "What the hell are you doing, Roger? You've knocked her out of the shot, you dolt! We shall have to do it all over again. I hope you've got a clean shirt. Have we plenty of blood? Get up, idiot! Are you all right, Delia?" he said with a sudden change of tone.

Several technicians and the First Aid woman rushed to the stream and helped Delia to her feet. She was as white as chalk, her mouth hanging open, her eyes rolling. They pulled her out of the stream and up the bank; she fell from their arms to the grass, and fainted. The First Aid woman produced smelling salts and applied them, tugged at the pitiful little skirt, and sharply ordered the would-be helpers to keep their distance.

"Is she hurt? You don't think she's hurt, do you? If she's hurt everything's ruined! She's in nearly every scene!" exclaimed the director. "That idiot Roger!" He stepped aside to reprimand the unfortunate Roger, but found the two First Aid men confronting him.

"Are you in touch with the town by radio, sir?" said the tall one.

"Of course not," said the director, keeping his rage firmly under control.

"The police may be," said the short one.

"Try them," said the tall one.

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"If not, someone must drive at once to the nearest telephone."

"What the hell are you talking about?" shouted the director.

"We need an ambulance at once. I'm afraid Mr. Anstruther—it's he who's playing Roger, I believe—is seriously injured."

"Don't be silly," said the director, laughing to conceal his exasperation. "That was just a well acted murder scene—only Roger overdid it."

"I'm afraid not, sir."

"Roger!" said the director, pushing the First Aid men apart so that he could see the actor's recumbent form. "Get up, man."

"I'm very much afraid he may be dead, sir," said the tall St. John's man, somber.

"What! Absurd! That isn't real blood, you know."

"I'm afraid it is."

"Yes. And that's a real knife," said the other St. John's man.

"No, no. It's impossible! This is just Roger's excessive realism," said the director in a soothing tone. He knelt beside the fallen actor and stretched out his hand to take the usual trick property knife that appeared to be sticking out of Roger's chest.

"Best not touch it," advised both First Aid men at once.

"The actor in the cloak was wearing gloves, though," added one.

The warning came too late. But the knife did not yield to the director's hand; it was not, in fact, a property knife and it was not adhering in the usual theatrical style to Roger's breast; the knife was a real one, sunk deep in his flesh.

The short man stooped and took Roger's wrist. "I can't feel any pulse," he said.

There was a long and frightful silence. Everyone stood motionless, and gaped.

In the hush a thudding, banging noise became audible in the distance.

"Officer!" cried the director suddenly, recovering his habit of command and springing to his feet. "Sergeant! Here! To me! A serious accident has occurred, we need an ambulance and a doctor at once. See to it. You First Aid men, bring something to cover poor Anstruther."

"Will this do?" said the pale fair young man, once more offering the artificial grass rug.

"Yes. Excellent. Thanks. What's the noise? Somebody stop that confounded banging," said the director irritably. "No, not you, Jack," he added seizing the cameraman's arm as he made to move off. "You move the camera back to the recording truck and stay there. And you, Constable, stand beside the truck. Don't you see," he went on impatiently as everyone stared at him, "the stabbing will be on film. The film will show the whole incident. It will be evidence. Where

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the hell is Verney? Somebody find him. He must have got hold of a real knife by accident somehow. What a mess! What a *mess*. Let's see the film now."

"I don't think it was Verney," murmured Miss Phipps as they all moved off toward the recording truck.

"Why not?" said the director sharply.

Miss Phipps had no chance to reply, for at this moment the group drew level with the dressing-room truck, and it became evident that Verney was inside.

"Help! Help! Let me out!" he yelled, at the same time banging hard with one fist on the door panels and shaking the handle viciously with his other hand.

The key to the truck was, in fact, protruding from the lock; the director turned it, the door swung open, and Verney in the cloak and hat of his role fell out. His colleagues gasped and stepped back on seeing—as they could not help thinking—a murderer dressed just as he had been when he had committed the crime.

"You're in a mess, Tom; don't say a word," said the director instantly.

"He's a very able young man," said Miss Phipps to herself. "He sees the thing immediately, with all its implications."

"What are you talking about?" said Verney. "I'm very sorry if I've held up the shot, but was it my fault I was locked in? Some ass locked me in. I just came in to have a last look at my nose, and some damn fool locked me in. Why on earth didn't somebody let me out? I've made noise enough, heaven knows."

"Where is your knife?" asked the director curtly.

"Here in my pocket," said Verney. He fumbled in the voluminous folds of his cloak and found a dagger. The director took it and bent it on its hinge; it was a trick knife, a prop. It was also, Miss Phipps observed, completely stainless. But that meant little.

"We had better search here, sir," said the police sergeant, appearing suddenly on the fringe of the group.

"What, for the knife? On Tyas Moor? There's a good deal of room for concealment," said the director ironically, glancing round at the wild landscape with its innumerable rocks, tufts, and hollows.

"It must be done, sir. We will begin with the trucks. An ambulance is on its way—we've summoned it by radio. Do I take it that you are all to have a meal at The Fleece in Tyas Foot?"

"That was the plan."

"It will be well to keep to it. If you will all go down there now, a police officer will accompany you and an Inspector will meet you there. We shall require a list of everybody present."

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"But what's wrong? What's happened?" said the bewildered Verney, gazing anxiously from face to face.

"Somebody dressed exactly like you stabbed poor Anstruther," said the director with cool concision.

"What do you mean?" shrieked Verney. "What?"

In the middle of this anguished cry he became suddenly and violently sick.

"We'll see it now," repeated the director firmly, and the sergeant, bundling them all into the appropriate truck, acquiesced.

It was an awful thought, reflected Miss Phipps, squeezed in the rear of the pale and silent crowd, that in a few moments they would see on the screen the actual committing of a real murder.

The tension was almost unbearable as the screen showed Delia bounding happily to the rock, seating herself with an apparent youthful awkwardness which was really full of grace—"How do they do it?" marveled Miss Phipps—and Roger following with a conceited air, too well dressed and all too pleased with himself, as the part required.

"Everyone very quiet and still, please," said the director at this point.

There was a policeman at the truck door, observed Miss Phipps—a real one, she thought. Perhaps in a moment the murderer among them would try to escape and be arrested.

Then the crucial moment was at hand. On the screen the cloaked figure, hat well down over brows, sprang round the knoll, and shrilling, "Drop dead!" plunged the knife into Roger's chest. The white-boots shrieked and swayed; somebody behind Miss Phipps fell heavily against her.

"It's no use. There isn't a glimpse of the figure or the face, and the voice is artificially high, hopelessly affected and unrecognizable. It will be no help towards discovery," said the director, disappointed.

"That's as may be," said the sergeant, portentous. "Now, all to the Fleece, please. If anyone should attempt to run away, it would be most unwise."

"It would be a clear proof of guilt, he means," reflected Miss Phipps.

"You'd better come with me in the police car, sir," said the sergeant politely to Verney.

"Sergeant," said Verney, who still looked green, meekly climbing into the car. "I swear to you that I was locked into the dressing-room truck during this—this entire incident."

"I'm sure I hope it may prove so, sir," replied the sergeant.

Surveying those present as they sat round a large table in The Fleece inn and pretended to eat,

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Miss Phipps reproached herself for having made no earlier effort to know them as persons. Now she observed their age and sex, their appearance, their preferences. One of the pseudo-policemen sat next to Delia; it was the golden-haired young man who had proffered the artificial grass; Delia as cold and pale as marble leaned aside and made no response to his solicitous attentions.

Another actor-policeman sat very close to one of the white-boots. A young male dogsbody followed every movement of the director with anxious eyes; one of the camera crew who usually climbed about and held the microphone in odd positions sat in a corner beside the boy who had wielded the clapper-board.

The make-up girl received the wailing confidences of Verney who, now that he had shed his false nose, looked like a very pleasant inexperienced lad. From the other side of the table one of the secretaries gazed at him with pity and, Miss Phipps thought, love. Their hair and eyes and ears, their complexions, speech, and clothes, the way they held their knives and forks and broke their bread and raised their glasses, all became intensely interesting to her; for some revealing clue might indicate who had stabbed the unfortunate Anstruther, and why.

Just as the meal was drawing to its dismal close, the sergeant ushered a police Inspector into the room. A large, solid, fresh-complexioned man, he allowed his gaze to wander slowly round the table, missing very little in Miss Phipp's opinion. He cleared his throat. Everyone gazed at him with breathless attention.

"I am sorry to have to tell you," he said, each word ponderous and slow, "that Mr. Anstruther died on the way to the hospital."

The company moaned.

"Miss Phipps, please," said the Inspector sharply, in a totally different tone—even his eyes seemed to have sharpened as they picked her out. "This way, please."

Miss Phipps followed him meekly into a side room.

"Now, Miss Phipps," said the Inspector, reverting to his milder tone, "your evidence will be of great value, of course. We are aware that you are a trained observer and have assisted the police on various previous occasions."

"I don't think I can be of much help this time," began Miss Phipps, "because, you see—"

"You stood a little apart from the group during the filming. Others were engaged with their own job, but you were watching the action. Is not that the case?"

"Yes, but—"

"Anyone who was in your view in his own person during the stabbing obviously could not have done the stabbing."

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"True," Miss Phipps agreed.

"We have a list of names. If you will just go through these names with us—"

"But I don't know their names, I know only their functions. I don't know them as *persons*. That is my difficulty here."

The Inspector sighed. "We will ask each member of the group to come in and check their names and addresses with our list. When each has left, if he or she was in your sight *as himself* at the relevant moment, just say, 'Yes.' It could be a he or a she, could it not?"

"Possibly. The cloak covered the entire figure. But the voice, though shrill—obviously disguised—was male, I thought."

"That was Mrs. Dobson's impression too."

"Mrs. Dobson?"

"She was playing the part of Delia."

"Ah," said Miss Phipps thoughtfully.

"Ask them to come in one at a time, Sergeant. Your careful attention, please, Miss Phipps."

This exercise, carried out with due care, certainly diminished the number of suspects. The director, the camera crew, the white-boots, the clapper-wielder, and some of the dogsbodies, had all been in Miss Phipps's direct view in their own persons, without costume. The only figures out of Miss Phipps's view proved to be the wretched Verney and the group of extras in police uniforms clustered round the coach.

"The policemen, so-called, would surely have seen if one of their number slipped away," said the Inspector.

"You don't understand actors," said Miss Phipps. "Their eyes would be glued to the action being filmed."

"But Verney had the *right* to be at the rock."

"Verney was locked in the dressing room," said Miss Phipps.

"So he says. But one can fake these things. Stick the key in the lock on the outside, and hold the door handle fast from within."

"Verney didn't do it."

"Miss Phipps," said the Inspector, suddenly turning harsh and cold, "my sergeant has talked to these people. He is of the opinion, and I share it, that we have two probable suspects. One has motive, the other opportunity with, I agree, a much less certain motive. Verney had the opportunity —the cloak, the hat, the scene—"

"Not the right kind of knife," said Miss Phipps.

"Cakes have been cut," said the Inspector drily.

"True. But—"

"Or the property knife might have slipped and struck wrongly. I'm willing to believe it was an accident, and then Verney panicked. A confession would be the best course for him."

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"Verney didn't do it."

"What leads you to that positive opinion, Miss Phipps?" said the Inspector with asperity.

"Who is your other suspect?"

"Mrs. Dobson's husband, who is playing an extra today—a policeman, I understand," said the Inspector. "He has some previous evidence of tantrums."

"Which one is he?"

"He has very yellow hair."

"Ah, the lad who brought the artificial grass for his wife's comfort," nodded Miss Phipps. "Well, there you have the murderer, I'm afraid. Poor young man."

"But he had so much less opportunity than Verney."

"Jealousy and all that. Cruel as the grave," continued Miss Phipps. "Roger—the dead man—was lively and handsome. The husband is—er—rather a wet blanket."

"Verney might have been jealous too, we understand," said the Inspector, very grim.

"Oh, really? I hadn't thought so, but I agree I haven't had much chance to judge. Delia is certainly very beautiful."

"I don't see it myself. A minx, I expect. The relevant point is that young Anstruther—Roger was well known to be a lady's man."

"Dear, dear! Well, he's met rather more than his deserts."

"From Verney."

"No. From Dobson."

"Your persistence is somewhat irritating, Miss Phipps. Verney had all the props, and the scene, at his disposal."

"There would be a duplicate cloak and hat about. Everything is carried in duplicate by this company, even fake blood. No, it wasn't Verney. I knew it was not Verney on the set, during the murder."

"Tell me why!" thundered the Inspector, his patience exhausted.

"I talked to Verney yesterday. He is a very serious young man, entirely dedicated to his profession, who believes in knowing his lines and uttering them as written. Dobson was an extra without lines—he would not have seen the script, he would not have known the murderer's lines. Verney assured me he would speak the murder-scene lines exactly as I had written them."

"And he did not do so?"

"Do you imagine I wrote a line like *Drop dead* in a serious murder scene?" said Miss Phipps, outraged. "I may have faults as a writer—but I am not as corny as that, I assure you. *Drop dead,* indeed!"

"I beg your pardon, I'm sure," said the Inspector. "But do you remember what you have written so well that you know on the instant when some of your words have been changed?"

"My dear man, of course!" said Miss Phipps, astonished.

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a NEW short story by

PATRICIA HIGHSMITH

You may wonder why this newest story by Patricia Highsmith appears in EQMM. Is it really in the mystery field? Well, there is the theft of a letter and an invasion of privacy—but these are admittedly slender criminous threads. There is a minor Federal offense—but definitely minor. There is a kind of poison-pen letter —but in reverse.

Perhaps it's the "feeling" of mystery—the bittersweet mystery of life. Certainly that mystery pervades Patricia Highsmith's story —elusively, tenuously, almost invisibly, but nevertheless present; that and a touching, compassionate story that will move you if you have ever known the terror and defeat and killing quality of loneliness—and who among us never has?

POISED TO FLY

by PATRICIA HIGHSMITH

EVERY MORNING DON LOOKED into his mailbox, but there was never a letter from her.

She hadn't had time, he would say to himself. He went over all the things she had to do—transport her belongings from Rome to Paris, settle into an apartment which she had presumably rented in Paris before she made the move, probably work a few days at her new job before she found time and inspiration to answer his letter.

But finally the greatest number of days to which he could stretch all this had come and gone; and three more days had passed—and still there was no letter from her.

"She's waiting to make up her mind," he told himself. "Naturally she wants to be sure about how she feels before she puts a word down on paper."

He had written to Rosalind thirteen days ago that he loved her and wanted to marry her. That was perhaps a bit hasty in

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view of a short courtship, but Don thought he had written a good letter, not exerting pressure, simply stating how he felt. After all, he had known Rosalind two years, or rather had met her in New York two years ago. He had seen her again in Europe last month, and now he was in love with her and wanted to marry her.

Since his return from Europe three weeks ago he had seen only a few of his friends. He had quite enough to occupy him in making plans for Rosalind and himself. Rosalind was an industrial designer, and she liked Europe. If she preferred to stay in Europe, Don could arrange to live there, too. His French was fairly good now. His company, Dirkson & Hall, consulting engineers, even had a branch in Paris. It could all be quite simple. Just a visa for him to take some things over, like books and a favorite carpet and his record player, some tools and drawing instruments, and he could make the move.

Don felt that he hadn't yet taken full stock of his happiness. Each day was like the lifting, just a little higher, of a curtain that revealed a magnificent landscape. He wanted Rosalind to be with him when he could finally see all of it. There was really only one thing that kept him from a happy, positive rush into that landscape now—the fact that he hadn't even a letter from her to take with him.

He wrote again to Rome and put a *Please forward* in Italian on the envelope. She was probably in Paris by now, but no doubt she had left a forwarding address in Rome.

Two more days passed, and still there was no letter. There was only a letter from his mother in California, an advertisement from a neighborhood liquor shop, and some kind of bulletin about a primary election. He smiled a little, snapped his mailbox shut and locked it, and strode off to work. It never made him feel sad, the instant he discovered there was no letter. It was rather a funny kind of shock, as if she had played a guileless little trick on him and was withholding her letter one more day.

Then the realization of the nine hours before him, until he could come home and see if a special delivery letter had arrived in the meantime, descended on him like a burden, and quite suddenly he felt tired and spiritless. Rosalind wouldn't write him a special delivery, not after all this time. There was never anything to do but wait until the next morning.

He saw a letter in the box the next morning. But it was an announcement of an art show. He tore it into tiny pieces and crushed them in his fist.

In the box next to his there

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were three letters. They had been there since yesterday morning, he remembered. Who was this fellow Dusenberry who didn't bother to collect his mail?

That morning in the office an idea came to him that raised his spirits: her letter might have been put into the box next to his by mistake. The mailman opened all the boxes at once, in a row, and at least once Don had found a letter for someone else in his own box.

He began to feel optimistic; her letter would say that she loved him, too. How could she not say it, when they had been so happy together in Juan-les-Pins? He would cable her: *I love you I love you.* No, he would telephone, because her letter would have her Paris address, possibly her office address also, and he would know where to reach her.

When he had met Rosalind two years ago in New York, they had gone out to dinner and to the theater two or three times. Then she hadn't accepted his next invitations, so Don had supposed there was another man in the picture whom she liked better. It hadn't mattered very much to him at that time. But when he had met her by accident in Juan-les-Pins, things had been quite different. It had been love at second sight.

The proof of it was that Rosalind had got free of three people she was with, another girl and two men, had let them go on without her to Cannes, and had stayed with him at Juan-les-Pins. They had had a perfect five days together, and Don had said, "I love you," and Rosalind had said it once, too. But they hadn't made plans about the future, or even talked about when they might see each other again.

How could he have been so stupid! He wished he had asked her to go to bed with him, for that matter. But on the other hand his emotions had been so much more serious. Any two people could have an affair on a holiday. To be in love and want to marry was something else. He had assumed, from her behavior, that she felt the same way. Rosalind was cool, smiling, brunette, not tall, but she gave the impression of tallness. She was intelligent, would never do anything foolish, Don felt, never do anything impulsive.

Nor would he ever propose to anyone on impulse. Marriage was something one thought over for some time—weeks, months, maybe a year or more. He felt he had thought over his proposal of marriage for longer than the five days in Juan-les-Pins. He believed that Rosalind was a girl or a woman (she was twenty-six, and he twenty-nine) of substance, that her work had much in common with his, and that they had eve-

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ry chance of happiness together.

That evening the three letters were still in Dusenberry's box, and Don looked for Dusenberry's bell in the list opposite the mailboxes, and rang it firmly. They might be in, even though they hadn't collected their mail.

No answer.

Dusenberry or the Dusenberrys were away, apparently.

Would the superintendent let him open the box? Certainly not. And the superintendent didn't have the key or keys, anyway.

One of the letters looked like an airmail envelope from Europe. It was maddening. Don put a finger in one of the slits in the polished metal front and tried to pull the box open. It remained closed. He pushed his own key into the lock and tried to turn it. The lock gave a snap, and the bolt moved, opening the box half an inch. But it wouldn't open any farther.

Don had his doorkeys in his hand, and he stuck one of the doorkeys between the box door and the brass frame and used it as a lever. The brass front bent enough for him to reach the letters. He took the letters and pressed the brass front back as straight as he could.

None of the letters was for him.

He looked at them, trembling like a thief. Then he thrust one into his coat pocket, pushed the others into the bent mailbox, and entered his apartment building. The elevators were around a corner. Don found one empty and ready, and rode up to the third floor alone.

His heart was pounding as he closed his own door. Why had he taken the one letter? He would put it back, of course. It had looked like a personal letter, but it was from America. He looked at its address in fine blue handwriting. Mr. R. L. Dusenberry, and so on. And at its return address on the back of the envelope: Edith W. Whitcomb, 717 Garfield Drive, Scranton, Pa.

Dusenberry's girl friend, he thought at once. It was a fat letter in a squarish envelope. He ought to put it back now. And the damaged mailbox? Well, there wouldn't be anything stolen from it, after all. A minor offense, to break a mailbox, but let them hammer it out. As long as nothing was stolen, was it so awful?

Don got a suit from his closet to take to the cleaners, and picked up the letter to Dusenberry. But with the letter in his hand he was suddenly curious to know what was in it. Before he had time to feel shame, he went to the kitchen and put on water to boil. The envelope flap began to curl back neatly in the steam, and Don was patient. The letter was three pages in longhand, the pages written on both sides.

"Darling," (it began)

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"I miss you so, I have to write to you. Have you really made up your mind how you feel? You said you thought it would all vanish for both of us. Do you know how *I* feel? The same way I did the night we stood on the bridge and watched the lights come on in Bennington ..."

Don read it through incredulously, and with fascination. The girl was madly in love with Dusenberry. She waited only for his answer. She spoke of the town in Vermont where they had been, and he wondered if they had met there or gone there together? My God, he thought, if Rosalind would only write him a letter like this! In this case, apparently Dusenberry wouldn't write to her. From the letter Dusenberry had not written even once since they had last seen each other. Don sealed the letter with glue, carefully, and put it into his pocket.

The last paragraph repeated itself in his mind:

"I didn't think I'd write to you again, but now I've done it. I have to be honest, because that's the way I am."

Don felt that was the way he was, too. The paragraph went on:

"Do you remember or have you forgotten, and do you want to see me again? If I don't hear in a few days I'll know.

My love always,
Edith"

He looked at the date on the envelope. The letter had been mailed six days ago. He thought of the girl called Edith Whitcomb spinning and stretching out the days, trying to convince herself somehow that the delay was justified. Six days. Yet of course she still hoped. She was hoping this minute down there in Scranton, Pennsylvania.

What kind of man was this Dusenberry? A Casanova? A married man who wanted to drop a flirtation? Which of the six or eight men he had ever noticed in his building was Dusenberry? One of the hatless chaps dashing out at 8:30 in the morning? A slower-moving man in a homburg? Don had never paid much attention to his neighbors.

He held his breath, and for an instant he seemed to feel the stab of the girl's own loneliness and her imperiled hope, to feel her last desperate flutterings of hope against his own lips. With one word he could make her so happy—or rather, Dusenberry could.

He put the suit down, went to his worktable, and wrote on a scrap of paper, "Edith, I love you." He liked seeing it written, legible. He felt it settled an important matter that had been precariously balanced before. Don crumpled up the paper and threw it into the wastepaper basket.

Then he went downstairs and

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forced the letter back in Dusenberry's box, and left his suit at the cleaners'. He walked a long way up Second Avenue, grew tired, and kept walking until he was at the edge of Harlem, and then he caught a bus downtown. He was hungry, but he couldn't think of anything he wanted to eat. He was thinking, deliberately, of nothing. He was waiting for the night to pass and for morning to bring the next mail delivery.

Then he was thinking of Rosalind. And of the girl in Scranton. A pity people had to suffer so much from their emotions. Like himself. For though Rosalind had made him so happy, he couldn't deny that these last three weeks had been an uninterrupted torture. Yes, my God, twenty-two days now! He felt strangely ashamed tonight of admitting it had been twenty-two days. Strangely ashamed? There was nothing strange about it, not if he faced it. He felt ashamed of possibly having lost her. He should have told her very definitely in Juan-les-Pins that he not only loved her but wanted to marry her. He might have lost her now because he hadn't told her before.

The thought made him get off the bus. He drove the horrible, deathly possibility out of his mind, kept it out of his mind and out of his flesh by walking.

Suddenly he had an inspiration. His idea didn't go very far, it hadn't an objective, but it was a kind of project for this evening. He began it on the way home, trying to imagine exactly what Dusenberry would write to Miss Whitcomb after he had read this last letter, if Dusenberry would write back not necessarily that he loved her but at least that he cared enough to want to see her again.

It took him about fifteen minutes to write the letter. He said that he had been silent all this while because he hadn't been sure of his own feelings or of hers. He said he wanted to see her before he told her anything, and asked her when she might be able to see him. He couldn't think of Dusenberry's first name, if the girl had used it at all in her letter, but he remembered the R. L. initials on the envelope, and signed it simply "R".

While he had been writing it he had not intended actually to send it to her; but as he read the typewritten words he began to consider the possibility. It was so little to give her, and seemed so harmless: When can we see each other? But of course it was futile and false also. Dusenberry obviously didn't care and never would, or he wouldn't have let six days go by. If Dusenberry didn't take up the situation where Don left it off, Don would be prolonging an unreality. He stared

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at the "R" and knew that all he wanted was an answer from "Edith," one single, positive, happy answer. So he wrote below the letter, again on the typewriter:

"P.S.: Could you write to me c/o Dirkson & Hall, Chanin Building, N.Y.C."

He could get the letter somehow, if Edith answered. And if she didn't write in a few days it would mean that Dusenberry had replied to her. Or if a letter from Edith came, Don could—he would have to—take it on himself to break off the affair as painlessly as possible.

After he mailed the letter he felt completely free of it, and somehow relieved. He slept well, and awakened with a conviction that a letter awaited him in the box downstairs. When he saw that there wasn't one (at least not one from Rosalind, only a telephone bill), he felt a swift and simple disappointment, an exasperation that he had not experienced before. Now there seemed no reason whatever why he shouldn't have got a letter.

A letter from Scranton was at the office the morning after next. Don spotted it on the receptionist's desk and took it, and the receptionist was so busy on the telephone at that moment that there was no question and not even a glance from her.

"My darling," it began, and he could scarcely bear to read its gush of sentiment, and folded the page up before anyone in the engineering department where he worked could see him reading it. He both liked and disliked having the letter in his pocket. He kept telling himself that he hadn't really expected a letter, but he knew that wasn't true. Why wouldn't she have written? She suggested they go somewhere together next week-end (evidently Dusenberry was as free as the wind), and she asked him to set the exact time and place.

He thought of her as he worked at his desk, thought of the ardent, palpitating, faceless piece of femininity in Scranton that he could manipulate with a word. Ironic! And he couldn't even make Rosalind answer him from Paris!

"God!" he whispered, and got up from his desk. He left the office without a word to anyone.

He had just thought of something fatal. It had occurred to him that Rosalind might all this time be planning how to tell him that she didn't love him, that she never really had or could. He was unable to get the idea out of his mind. Now instead of imagining her happy, puzzled, or secretly pleased face, he saw her frowning over the awkward chore of composing a letter that would break it all off. He felt her pondering the phrases that would do it most gently.

The idea so upset him that he

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could do nothing that evening. The more he thought about it, the more likely it seemed that she *was* writing to him, or contemplating writing to him, to end it. He could imagine the exact steps by which she might have come to the decision: after the first brief period of missing him she must have come to the realization that she could do without him when she was so occupied with her job and her friends in Paris, as he knew she must be. Second, the reality of the circumstances that he was in America and she in Europe might have cooled or changed her feelings. But above all, perhaps, the fact that she had discovered she didn't really love him. This at least must be true, because people simply didn't neglect for so long to write to people they cared about.

Abruptly he stood up, staring at the clock, facing it like a thing to be fought. 8:17 P.M., September 15th. He bore its whole weight on his tense body and in his clenched hands. Twenty-five days, so many hours, so many minutes, since his first letter...

His mind slid from under the weight and fastened on the girl in Scranton. He felt he owed her a reply. He read her letter over again, more carefully, lingering over a phrase here and there, as if he cared profoundly about her hopeless and dangling love, almost as if it were his own love. Here was someone who pleaded with him to tell her a time and place of meeting. Ardent, eager, a captive of herself only, she was a bird poised to fly.

Suddenly he went to the telephone and dictated a telegram:

MEET ME GRAND CENTRAL TERMINAL LEXINGTON SIDE FRIDAY 6 P.M. LOVE R

Friday was the day after tomorrow.

Thursday there was still no letter from Rosalind, and now he had not the courage or perhaps the physical energy to imagine anything about her. There was only his love inside him, undiminished, and heavy as a rock.

As soon as he got up Friday morning he thought of the girl in Scranton. She would be getting up this morning and packing her bag, or if she went to work at all, would move in a dreamworld of Dusenberry all day.

When he went downstairs he saw the red and blue border of an airmail envelope in his box, and felt a slow, almost painful shock. He opened the box and dragged the long flimsy envelope out, his hands shaking, dropping his keys at his feet. The letter was only about fifteen typewritten lines.

"September 15th

"Don,

Terribly sorry to have wait-

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ed so long to answer your letter, but it's been one thing after another here. Only today got settled enough to begin work. Was delayed in Rome first of all, and getting the apartment organized here has been hellish because of strikes of electricians and whatnot.

You are an angel, Don, I know that and I won't forget it. I won't forget our days on the Cote either. But darling, I can't see myself changing my life radically and abruptly either to marry here or anywhere. I can't possibly get to the States at Christmas, things are too busy here, and why should you uproot yourself from New York? Maybe by Christmas, maybe by the time you get this, your feelings will have changed a bit.

But will you write me again? And not let this make you too unhappy? And can we see each other again some time? Maybe unexpectedly and wonderfully as it was in Juan-les-Pins?

Rosalind"

He stuffed the letter into his pocket and plunged out the door. His thoughts were a chaos, signals of a mortal distress, cries of a silent death, the confused orders of a routed army to rally itself before it was too late, not to give up, not to die.

One thought came through fairly clearly: he had frightened her. His stupid, unrestrained avowal, his torrent of plans must have turned her against him. If he had said only half as much, she would have known how much he loved her. But he had been specific. He had said, "Darling, I adore you. Can you come to New York over Christmas? If not, I can fly to Paris. I want to marry you. If you prefer to live in Europe, I'll arrange to live there, too. I can so easily ..."

What an imbecile he had been!

His mind was already busy at correcting the mistake, already composing the next casual but affectionate letter that would give her some space to breathe in. He would write it this very evening, carefully, and get it exactly right ...

Don left the office early that afternoon, and was home by a few minutes after 5:00. The clock reminded him that the girl from Scranton would be at Grand Central at six o'clock. He should go and meet her, he thought, though he didn't know why. He certainly wouldn't speak to her. He wouldn't even know her if he saw her, of course.

Still, the Grand Central Terminal, rather than the girl, pulled at him like a steady, gentle magnet. He began to change his clothes. He put on his best suit, hesitantly fingered the tie rack, and snatched off a solid blue tie. He felt unsteady and weak, rather

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as if he were evaporating like the cool sweat that kept forming on his forehead.

He walked downtown toward Forty-second Street.

He saw two or three young women at the Lexington Avenue entrance of the Terminal who might have been Edith W. Whitcomb. He looked for something initialed that they carried, but they had nothing with initials. Then one of the girls met the person she had been waiting for, and suddenly he was sure Edith was the blonde girl in the black cloth coat and the black beret with the military pin. Yes, there was an anxiety in her wide round eyes that couldn't have come from anything else but the anticipation of meeting someone she loved, and loved anxiously. She looked about twenty-two, unmarried, fresh and hopeful—hope, that was the thing about her—and she carried a small suitcase, just the size for a week-end.

He hovered near her for a few minutes, and she gave him not the slightest glance. She stood at the right of the big doors and inside them, stretching on tiptoe now and then to see over the rushing, bumping crowds. A glow of light from the doorway showed her rounded, pinkish cheek, the sheen of her hair, the eagerness of her straining eyes. It was already 6:35.

Of course, it might not be she, he thought. Then he felt suddenly bored, vaguely ashamed of himself, and walked over to Third Avenue to get something to eat, or at least a cup of coffee. He went into a coffee shop. He had bought a newspaper, and he propped it up and tried to read as he waited to be served. But when the waitress came he realized he did not want anything, and got up with a murmured apology.

He'd go back and see if the girl was still there, he thought. He hoped she wasn't there, because it was a rotten trick he'd played. If she was still there, he really ought to confess to her that it was a trick.

She was still there. As soon as he saw her she started walking with her suitcase toward the Information Desk. He watched her circle the Information Desk and come back again, start for the same spot by the doors, then change to the other side, as if for luck. And the beautiful, flying line of her eyebrow was tensely set now at an angle of tortured waiting, of almost hopeless hope.

But there is still that shred of hope, he thought to himself, and simple as it was, he felt it the strongest concept, the strongest truth that had ever come to him.

He walked past her, and now she did glance at him and looked immediately beyond him. She was

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staring across Lexington Avenue and into space. Her young, round eyes were brightening with tears, he noticed.

With his hands in his pockets he strolled past, looking her straight in the face, and as she glanced irritably at him he smiled. Her eyes came back to him, full of shock and resentment, and he laughed, a short laugh that simply burst out of him. But he might as well have cried, he thought. He just happened to have laughed instead. He knew what the girl was feeling. He knew exactly.

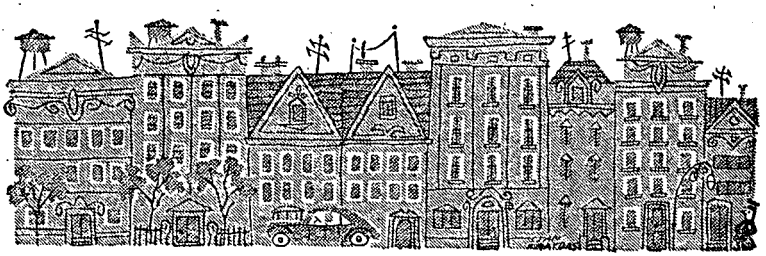
"I'm sorry," he said.

She started, and looked at him in puzzled surprise.

"Sorry," he repeated, and turned away.

When he looked back, she was staring at him with a frowning bewilderment that was almost like fear. Then she looked away and stretched superiorly high on her toes to peer over the bobbing heads—and the last thing he saw of her was her shining eyes with the determined, senseless, self-abandoned hope in them.

And as he walked up Lexington Avenue he did cry. Now his eyes were exactly like those of the girl, he knew, shining, full of a relentless hope. He lifted his head proudly. He had his letter to Rosalind to write tonight and he began to compose it.



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a detective story about

THE GREAT MERLINI

by CLAYTON RAWSON

Originally this Merlini short story was, believe it or not, a boxed jigsaw puzzle. Accompanying the puzzle was a text, in short-story form, that gave the circumstances of a murder mystery, stopping at the moment when The Great Merlini announced he knew the identity of the murderer. At that point the reader had to put together the jigsaw pieces; then, by studying the completed jigsaw, the reader could spot the clues that The Great Merlini had seen. The illustration (page 34) is a black-and-white reproduction of the jigsaw before it had been cut up and jumbled into many interlocking pieces—the photo worth a thousand words.

So, consider yourself challenged. Can you "read the picture" as well as The Great Merlini did?

MERLINI AND THE PHOTOGRAPHIC CLUES

by CLAYTON RAWSON

TWO MEN LIFTED THE GIRL'S rigid body and placed it in a box shaped like a coffin. Her head projected at one end, her feet at the other. A tall lean gentleman in evening dress placed a large crosscut saw, whose jagged teeth glinted ominously in the light, across the center of the box. He smiled and began sawing through both box and girl.

This murderous process was half completed when a stout red-faced man suddenly erupted from the wings and shot onstage as if jet-propelled. It was George J. Boyle, the producer of *Magic and Music,* and he was living up to his name. He was boiling with all the hot bubbling intensity of a fresh batch of volcanic lava.

"House lights!" he roared. The

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ight man was no fool; the house ights came up instantly and the lress-rehearsal came to a full stop.

The Great Merlini stepped for-ward, leaving the box and the girl half severed. His voice, usual-y urbane and good-humored, now had a cutting edge as sharp as he saw's steel teeth.

"If we're going to get the open-ng night curtain up at eight thir-y—"

Boyle moved in on him with ll the grace and unshakable de-ermination of an army tank. 'You," he rumbled, shaking a fat orefinger under Merlini's nose, 'are going to produce the leading ady out of a hat."

Merlini shook his head. "No. 'm not. You've been rewriting ines, changing scenes, and adding iew business all day. If you think 'm going to whip up another niracle two hours before curtain ime—"

Boyle boiled over. "Curtain ime!" he howled. "There isn't go-ng to be any curtain. There isn't going to be an opening night. There isn't going to be any show! Not without Inez Latour!" Then, hunderously, came the final ex-plosion. "She has just been arrest-d for murder!"

Merlini is a magician, but that topped even him. Boyle got the est of it out without interruption. He fumed at such white heat that his story wasn't too coherent. But, once the pieces had been jigsawed together, the general idea seemed to be that the nationally famous Broadway gossip-columnist, Lester Lee, had been shot and killed, and a delegation of cops had just raid-ed the theater, gathered up Inez Latour, and taken her away for questioning.

"She deserves a medal," Boyle spluttered. "But why does she have to kill that rat-faced, long-nosed Peeping Tom at a time like this? Merlini, you know the hom-icide boys. You sent Inspector Ga-vigan a pair of opening-night tick-ets. Get busy! Get her back here —*before curtain time!*"

Merlini groaned. "Whenever something impossible needs to be done, everybody seems to think that just because I'm a magician—"

"You won't be a magician to-night if you stand there mutter-ing," the producer bellowed. "You'll be an actor out of work. Get out of here! And bring Miss Latour back!"

Arguing with George J. Boyle was always tough. Right now it was impossible—even for a magi-cian. Merlini turned and walked into the wings toward the stage door.

Much too late the girl in the box who was half sawed in two called after him, "Hey! What about me?"

But Merlini was already at a phone dialing Spring 7-3100. He talked briefly to headquarters and then, outside, hailed a cab. A few

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minutes later, Lieutenant Malloy of the Homicide Squad let him into an office on the third floor of the Chandler Building on 45th Street. Inez Latour, tall, beautiful, blonde and nervous as a cat, sat in a low armchair facing the menacing bulk of Inspector Homer Gavigan.

"So you only know Lester Lee casually," Gavigan was saying. "And you haven't seen him for weeks. You're quite sure about that?"

There was nothing nervous about her voice. She made it sound very convincing. "Yes," she said flatly. "I am."

The Inspector was not an actor, but he sounded just as convincing and twice as confident. "Lester Lee was shot in this office at 1:25 this afternoon. We have witnesses who heard the shot. We also have witnesses who saw you in the lobby downstairs on your way out at 1:30. And don't tell me you were here visiting your hairdresser." He turned and pointed toward the blood-soaked blotter on the broad mahogany desk. "Your fingerprints are on that desk top."

Silence.

When the actress finally spoke, her voice was flat and dead, all the self-confidence gone. "All right. I saw him here. But I left at a quarter after one. And he was still alive. Inspector, you've got to believe that. You—"

"And why did it take you fifteen minutes to get downstairs?"

"I stopped in a phone booth in the lobby. I—"

"The person you called can confirm that?"

Miss Latour's voice was only a whisper now. "I made two calls. Neither person answered."

"I see," Gavigan said without any inflection whatever. "Now tell me what you talked to Lee about."

The actress shook her head. "No." Then she said it again. "No. I want my lawyer."

"You'll need one," Gavigan told her. "I hope he's a good one. When we got Lester Lee's safe open we found a very interesting collection of photos. Candid shots of celebrities who didn't know they were being photographed at the time, but who found out about it later—from Lester Lee."

Lieutenant Malloy handed the Inspector two glossy eight-by-ten prints and he held them before Miss Latour. "I don't need to tell you that the man who is with you in these pictures is the underworld bigshot, Frank Barnett. And the best lawyer in town isn't going to convince any jury, after they've seen these photos, that you didn't know Frankie very well indeed."

The well-publicized Latour temper had been well concealed up to this point. Now it exploded. "The dirty double-crossing little rat! I paid him ten grand for those negatives!"

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Gavigan followed through uickly. "And he held out an ex- a set of prints so he could shake ɔu down again later. What was ɜ doing? Threatening to show ıem to your social-register, mil- ɔnaire fiance, Harvey Vankyll?" But she had finished talking. urther questions were all met ith the repeated demand: "I ant my lawyer."

Gavigan gave up temporarily. Take her outside," he told Mal- y. "But keep her on ice."

As she went out, Merlini's emp- right hand reached up and ɔok a lighted cigarette from thin r. "Inspector," he said, "you've ɔt a one-track mind. If Lee ran blackmail business on the side, ıe's a long way from being your ıly suspect. What about Barnett? ester Lee has been riding him ı his column, accusing him of ulling all sorts of political strings ehind the scenes at City Hall. I ɔubt if Barnett likes that very ıuch. What if he warned Lee to y off and Lee refused?

"And what about Ram Singh, ıe Hindu radio mind reader? ee has been hinting pretty broad- in print that Singh's telepathic emonstrations aren't the real IcCoy, that he can prove the hole act is a trick, and that ingh is a fraud. If he did, that ould queer Singh's pitch and ɜse him his sponsor. And what ɔout—"

"If you think you're pulling rab- bits out of hats," Gavigan broke in, "you're mistaken. I'm way ahead of you."

"Yes," Merlini admitted as the door opened. "I see."

The man Lieutenant Malloy ushered in, a swarthy-faced, expensively dressed, hard-eyed individual, was Frankie Barnett in the flesh—a smooth character whose actions said clearly that he wasn't afraid of anything in a cop's uniform. He sauntered in, eyed the bloodstained desk top and the Inspector with an equal lack of interest, then waited for someone else to make the first move.

Gavigan made it. "Where were you between one and two this afternoon?"

Frankie took his time about answering. Then he said, "This is embarrassing. I spent most of the afternoon, from twelve on, with a certain city official who wouldn't want it mentioned."

"And if you named him," Gavigan said, "he'd deny it quicker than you can say 'Not Guilty.' Frankie, if that's the best you can do you're in a spot."

Barnett wasn't so sure. "Maybe," he said. "And maybe not. Let me ask you one, copper. Just how dumb do you think I am? If I bumped a guy wouldn't I come up with a better alibi than that?"

"You usually do," the Inspector said. "But mistakes can happen. You don't do the dirty work yourself; you leave that to the hired

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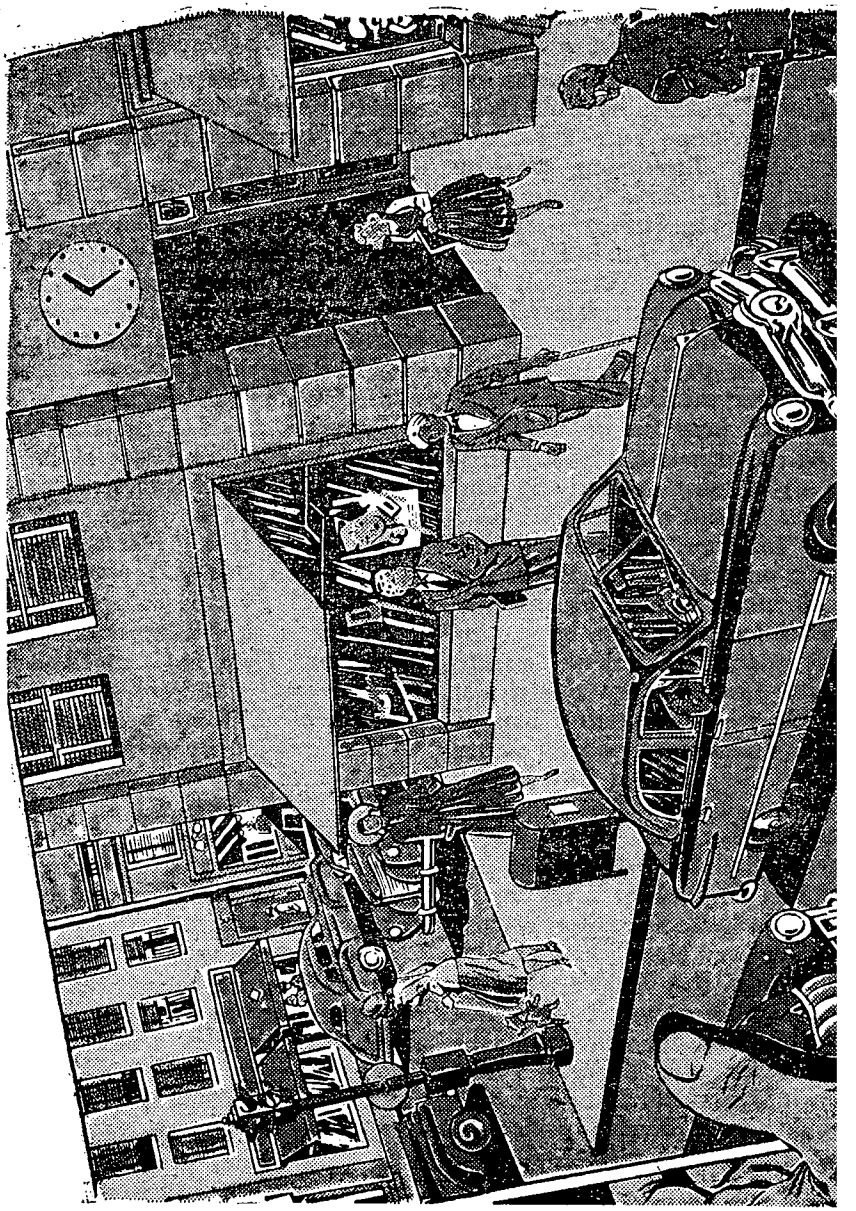

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help. And this time one of your boys pulled the job at the wrong time—when you weren't set with an alibi."

Frankie grinned and said, "Prove it, copper," just as a bright flash of light exploded in the doorway.

The look the Inspector threw in that direction would have shriveled anyone else; but "Doc" Reilly, the free-lance news photographer who stood there with his camera, had armor plate for skin. And the order Gavigan gave Malloy to toss him out on his ear had no effect.

"You'll be sorry, Inspector," the photographer said cheerfully, before Malloy could reach him. "I brought you a present. How would you like to see a photo of the scene of the crime only a minute or two after Lee was shot —in technicolor?"

"And just how do you know exactly when he was killed?" Gavigan asked suspiciously. "I gave orders—"

"You didn't give me any," Reilly answered as he side-stepped Malloy and came into the room. "I heard the shot. I was in the New York *Courier* building right across the street and I'd just loaded my camera with some new color film that I was itching to try. I couldn't tell what office in this building the shot came from, but I figured maybe a photographic record of the people who lammed out of here between then and the time the prowl-car boys arrived might come in handy. So I grabbed a few." He laid a color print on the desk. "This one is a lulu."

Inspector Gavigan scowled at it. Merlini took one quick look and said, "I wonder if you know just how much of a lulu it is. The dark-skinned man in the turban who is walking out the front door is—Ram Singh!"

For perhaps ten seconds no one said a word. Then Malloy, who had answered the phone while Reilly was speaking, dropped an even heavier blockbuster. "That tears it," he said. "The boys grabbed the Hindu at LaGuardia. He was trying to check out on the plane to the Coast. But they turned him around and he's on his way up here now—in handcuffs."

He arrived ten minutes later between two detectives—a slender, hollow-eyed man who looked, except for the steel cuffs on his wrists, as if he had just stepped out of "Doc" Reilly's photo. But his famed mind-reading powers didn't seem to be working too well; he expressed surprise at Lee's death and denied knowing anything at all about it.

"I flew in from Hollywood last night," he said. "And I've got to be back there in time for my broadcast tomorrow. I'll admit that I did have an interview with Les-

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ter Lee in this office at ten this morning. I came directly here right after I landed at the airport. I talked to him for half an hour. I haven't seen him since."

"You talked about what?" Gavigan asked.

The Hindu scowled. "He had been threatening to print a—a libelous story about me. I talked him out of it."

"How much did it cost you?"

Singh raised an eyebrow. "Cost me? Nothing. I read his mind and he had to admit that my supernormal powers are genuine."

"Oh, yeah?" Gavigan said with vast skepticism. "If you're such a good mind reader you should know what I'm thinking. We found a little agreement in Lee's safe bearing your signature. You promised to cut him in for fifty percent of your take as long as your show remains on the air. Now tell me what happened when you came back again this afternoon."

The mind reader shook his head. "I did not come back."

"No?" Gavigan held up Reilly's photo. "Take a good look at this. There's a clock in that picture. The time is 1:27. Lee was shot at 1:25. I want to see your supernormal powers get you out of that one."

The Hindu frowned momentarily, then slowly shook his head. "Inspector," he said, "if you ever try to introduce that photograph in court you are going to run into trouble. It just happens that there are several hundred thousand witnesses who can swear that I was in another place at that time."

Gavigan sounded as if this were the first time in his life anyone had ever mentioned such a figure. "Several hundred thousand—"

"Perhaps more," Ram Singh added. "I was a guest star on a television program broadcast live from the downtown studios of WNX-TV—at least two miles from the place where this picture was taken."

Lieutenant Malloy didn't have to be told. He began dialing the phone before Ram Singh had finished. But he didn't like the answers he got.

"The studio confirms it," he said, eyeing the Hindu as if he were a sideshow exhibit with two heads. "They say he was busy reading minds in front of a studio audience and two television cameras from 1:15 to 1:30. How the devil did he do a trick like that?"

"Easy," Gavigan replied. "He pulled a fast one at the studio. Someone impersonated him on that broadcast."

"And gave an exhibition of mind reading, too?" Singh asked. "I don't think so. It would have been much easier for someone to have impersonated me leaving this building at 1:27. That photo was taken from across the street. Some

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suntan makeup and a turban is all that would have been needed."

"Barnett," Malloy muttered, "is the same size and build—"

Then, suddenly, The Great Merlini snapped his fingers and a silver dollar appeared instantly at his fingertips. "It's a good trick, Inspector, a very good trick. The mystery of the murderer who could be in two places at once." A second coin appeared from nowhere in the magician's other hand. "But the miracle is less than perfect. It has one glaring flaw."

Merlini dropped both coins into his left hand, then slowly opened his fingers to show—nothing at all. He picked up the color photo. "The clues that tell us how the miracle was done, and, for good measure, tell us which of the people you've just questioned killed Lester Lee are right here—staring us in the face in this photo."

EDITORIAL CHALLENGE: *Can you match wits with The Great Merlini? Study the reproduction of the photo (page 34)—the clues are all visible to the naked eye ...*

"I don't get it," Gavigan said.

Merlini placed a long forefinger on the photo. "Notice anything odd about the Chandler Building?"

Malloy suddenly grunted. "Yeah! It's moved! It's on the wrong corner of the street!"

Merlini grinned. "It seems to have moved quite a distance, too. Apparently a trans-Atlantic jump! Look at the car in the foreground—the steering wheel is on the wrong side. And the driver seems to think he's in London—he's driving on the left-hand side of the street. Forty-fifth street is a one-way street going in the opposite direction. If some giant poltergeist moved the Chandler Building from 45th St. to Fleet Street for a few hours and then returned it, this photo may be evidential proof of the most startling and incredible feat in the whole history of 'things that go bump' in the night."

Gavigan sputtered, "What the blazes are you talking about? All I know is you're making a mountain out of a molehill—and I don't even like the molehill."

"I'm talking," Merlini explained, "about a trick that might have been done with mirrors. When Reilly made this print he simply flopped the negative."

"He what—?" Malloy asked.

"He simply turned the negative over and made the print from the wrong side. That reversed everything. Look at Ram Singh's jacket. It buttons on the wrong side. You're looking at a mirror image."

He reached into thin air and,

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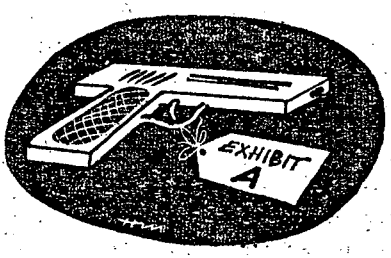
like the silver dollars, a small round pocket mirror winked into being at his fingertips.

"Take a look at the photo in this," Merlini said. "Then you'll see the scene as the camera really saw it."

Gavigan snatched the mirror and held the photo in front of it. "The clock!" he exclaimed. "It doesn't read 1:27. It says 10:33!"

"And that," Merlini added, "solves your case. Ram Singh was telling the truth. He saw Lee this morning and the photo was taken as he left the building at 10:33, when Reilly was trying out his new color film. Reilly lied when he said he took the picture this afternoon a minute or two after the crime. He shot it nearly three hours before he shot Lee. When he printed the photo, he noticed the clock and realized that a reversed print would make it appear that he was in the *Courier* building at 1:25 and not in Lee's office. He knew that unless he had a solid alibi, it wouldn't take you long to dig out that he was the man who had been taking Lee's blackmail pictures.

"A picture may be worth a thousand words, but it doesn't always tell the truth. Actually, at 1:25, Reilly came across to this room and shot Lee. With a gun—not a camera."



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It was a small room—no more than a box. No window. One door, locked and guarded. Anyone in the room was absolutely safe from attack. And yet—

MURDER IN A LOCKED BOX

by PATRICK MEADOWS

IT WAS THE HOTTEST DAY OF THE year. Tar on roofs and macadam streets bubbled in the sun. Sidewalks burned the feet of pedestrians through their shoes.

Chief Delancey wiped his neck and swore. His office in the central precinct building was not air-conditioned. Sure, there were windows. But the air coming through them was worse than what was in the room to begin with.

He thought of "Chops" Moran upstairs in the grilling room. It was cool there. The dropout from the underworld was comfortable and coddled—at least, for the time being. Soon enough he would be in a penitentiary upstate.

Delancey glanced at the transcript of the morning's interrogation. He decided that the heat was not too much to bear. At least three of the top racketeers in the city could be picked up on the basis of Chops's statement. It would have to be substantiated, of course, but half the legmen under Delancey were already pounding the pavement to corroborate the accusations.

Delancey hung his handkerchief on the back of a chair and took the one already draped there. It was not yet dry but it was better than the sopping cloth he had just hung up.

He glanced up at the TV monitor showing the box of a room that held Chops safe from those who would like to get at him before he spilled any more names. Chops was pacing nervously. He had the shuffling gait so common to failures everywhere in and out of the world of crime. His shoulders slumped, and from time to time he wrung his hands.

Delancey was thinking that this third-rate bagman really had nothing to worry about. The room was absolutely foolproof. There were no windows. The only door was locked and guarded by men Delancey trusted implicitly.

He was about to start a third reading of the transcript. There was something in it, some refer-

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ence that had eluded him and kept nagging at his mind. Then Chops made a sudden move on the TV screen. His head turned away from the door and he looked toward the ceiling.

Before Delancey could move his hand to the intercom and push the stud, Chops had dropped to the floor. His body jerked twice in spasms that were the most decisive movements he had ever made in his life. They were also his last movements.

Delancey's finger found the stud on the intercom at the same moment the inter-office phone rang. Keeping his eyes on the screen, he answered the phone.

"Chief, something's—" The voice on the other end was frantic and incredulous.

"I saw it. Seal off the building. Not even the Commissioner leaves. Got that?" Delancey hung up before the voice even acknowledged the instructions.

Not more than two minutes at the most passed. The door to the room opened and the bottom of the door shoved Chops's knees closer to his chin.

Delancey pressed a stud on the intercom.

"Yeah, Chief?"

"Chops is hit. Don't ask how. Throw the elevator switch and block the stairs. Handcuff anybody who moves unless it's the mayor. Just collar him."

He released the stud and headed for the stairs to climb the four flights. A backward glance at the TV screen showed three security guards already bending over Chops's body.

Then a piece of information fell into place as he went up the stairs two at a time.

About five minutes too late, he thought.

Delancey hurled his bulk into the small room. The others crowded back.

"Cyanide. But he was clean, Chief. We went over him like nobody ever went over anybody before. It just couldn't happen."

"It couldn't happen, but he's dead. And he didn't do it himself. He was too much a coward anyway."

"But if *he* didn't—"

"Get the janitor and take him to my office. I'll meet you there."

Detective Laramy started to say something but saw from the look on Delancey's face that he'd better not.

When he was gone, Delancey asked one of the other detectives, "What's the modern title for a janitor, Jamie?"

"Maintenance man, or something like that."

"You get a big fat zero, same as me. Anybody else want to try for the prize?"

Bill Jefferson's father had put him through school on his wages as a janitor.

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"Building engineer?" Jefferson uggested.

"That's it, Bill. Where were you vhen we needed you?" He looked it the puzzled faces around him. 'For Pete's sake, I haven't cracked ip! Didn't anybody else wonder ibout the 'inside engineer' Chops nentioned this morning?" The faces were still puzzled. "No, I guess not. I'm the only one that does any thinking around here. And I'm too slow doing it."

One stupid oversight like this is all the time they needed. He mentally kicked himself and left the room.

I.D. had already sent up the file on Ben Carter, building engineer for the past seven months.

"Carter, I'm going to ask you just once before the boys get their turn with you downstairs." Delancey wished that "downstairs" was as effective a threat as it used to be.

"Who fixed you for the hit on Chops?"

The answer was as expected as an echo.

"I don't know what you're talking about. I want my lawyer."

Delancey sighed and pointed to the phone.

"Right there. But there's no use wasting the city's money. We both know your lawyer will be here in a few minutes. However, go ahead if you want to."

Carter reached for the phone.

"Just a minute."

Carter pulled his hand back.

"It's pretty hard to get cyanide these days. The amount you needed can be traced pretty easily. Sure you don't want to start things off right by turning State's evidence?"

Carter made no reply. He picked up the phone from the cradle.

Laramy sat on the corner of Delancey's desk.

"Chief, have you gone off your head? Carter didn't even try to run. He was sitting in the basement the whole time. What makes you think—"

"Okay, Laramy Let's look at it. He didn't run because he was sure no one would even suspect him." With his left hand he waved Laramy off his desk. "Now what goes in and out of the box all day long?"

From the corner of his eye he saw Carter hesitate while dialing a number.

Laramy turned his palms up. "Riddles I'm no good at."

"Air, that's what. Nice cool air. And where does it come from? The central unit in the basement. The box is new. The duct to the box is new, probably completely separate from the original vent. Easy to place a container of cyanide inside one of the elbows and know that it will be forced into the box and nowhere else. Right?"

Carter set the phone down.

"Hell, Chief, Bill and Jamie were in that room practically be-

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fore Chops hit the floor. Why didn't they get it?"

"A day like this the exchange of air in that room must be terrific. Chops could have held his breath for two minutes and still be alive. The duct near the floor sucking out the old air pulled the stuff right back into the filters. Isn't that right, Carter?" He turned abruptly to face him.

Carter's face was sagging. He was ready to talk.

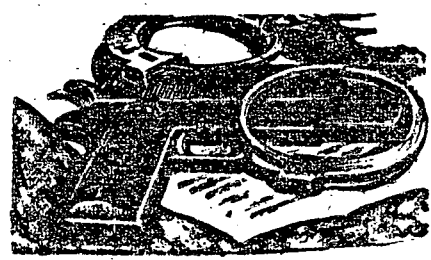
"Now, Detective Laramy, why don't you go down to the basement and look for the container. There should be a gas mask down there too. I suggest you find that first."

Carter spoke. "In the tool chest."

Laramy left, nodding his head. Delancey saw by the look on Carter's face that he was about to say something else.

"Just don't put me in that room." The janitor shivered.

Delancey silently agreed with him. He turned the fan directly on his own face and decided it was better to sweat off a few pounds in the heat than to be stiff in the cold.



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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Here are the 332nd and 333rd "first stories" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine... The author submitted two "first stories" simultaneously. We couldn't decide which one was the first "first," and we couldn't decide which one we liked better—a thematic dilemma you may also find yourself in. So we ducked both decisions by deciding to publish both "firsts" at the same time...

Len Gray (a pseudonym) is in his mid-twenties. For two years preceding his double submission he studied under Lawrence Edward Watkin, author of "On Borrowed Time," at California State College where, this past June, "Len Gray" received his B.A. in English. It was Mr. Watkin who urged Len Gray to send his first two stories to EQMM. We thank Mr. Watkin for his knowledge of EQMM, and even more for his recommendation of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine to one of his students.

Mr. Gray is married to—as he phrased it—his typist Patricia. While attending college, he worked as an insurance underwriter. He enjoys hearing records, watching motion pictures, and reading mysteries, and some day he hopes to be a full-time mystery writer. We'd take bets that he makes it...

THE LITTLE OLD LADY FROM CRICKET CREEK

by LEN GRAY

ART BOWEN AND I WERE TRYING to analyze performance evaluations when Penny Thorpe, my secretary, walked into the office.

"Yeah, Penny. What's up?"

"Mr. Cummings, there's a woman out in the lobby. She's applying for the file clerk's job." Penny walked over and laid the application form on my desk.

"Good, good. I sure hope she's not one of those high-school drop-

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outs we've been getting—" I stopped, staring at the form. "Age fifty-five!" I roared. "What the hell are we running around here? A playground for Whistler's mother?"

Art put his Roman nose in it. "Now, Ralph, let's take it easy. Maybe the old gal's a good worker. We can't kick 'em out of the building just because they've been around a few years. How's the app?" Good old Art. The peacemaker. With about as much sense as a lost Cub Scout.

"Well," I said doubtfully, "it says her name is Mabel Jumpstone. That's right. Jumpstone. Good experience. Seems qualified. *If* she checks out. You game for an interview?"

"Sure. Why not? Let's do one together," which is against the company policy of Great Riveroak Insurance Company. All personnel interviewers are to conduct separate interviews and make individual decisions—at least that's what we're supposed to do. Usually we double up and save time.

Penny remained standing in front of my desk, tapping her pencil on the glass top. "Well?" she asked haughtily, which sums up her disposition perfectly.

"Okay, Penny. Send Mrs. Jumpstone in."

She came shuffling into the office, smiling and nodding her head like an old gray mare. Her black outfit looked like pre-World War I. She had on a purple hat with pink plastic flowers around the brim. She reminded me of Ida Crabtree, my housekeeper, whose one passion in life is running over stray cats in her yellow Packard.

She sat down in the wooden chair and said, "Hello there!" Her voice was almost a bellow.

I looked at Art who was leaning forward in his chair, his mouth open, his eyes round.

"Uh . . . Mrs. Jumpstone," I began.

"Mabel. Please."

"Okay, Mabel. This is Mr. Bowen, my associate." I waved a hand at Art, who mumbled something inappropriate.

"This is a very interesting application, Mabel. It says here you were born in Cricket Creek, California."

"That's right, young man. Home of John and Mary Jackson." She smiled at me, proud of the information.

Art bent over, scratching his wrist. "John and Mary Jackson?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, "the gladiola growers."

He tried to smile. I'll give him credit. "The—the—oh, yes, of course. It must have slipped my mind. Let me see that application, Ralph." He grabbed it from the desk and took a few minutes to study it thoroughly.

Mabel and I sat and watched each other. Every once in a while she'd wink. I tried looking at the ceiling.

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Art glanced up and snapped, "You worked at Upstate California ınsurance for ten years. Why did ɔu quit?" Sharp-thinking Art. He ıade a career of trying to catch ɛople off guard. I'd never seen im do it yet.

Mabel shrugged her tiny shoulers. "Young man, have you ever ved up north? It's another world. ɔold and foggy. I just had to ɜave. I told Harry—that's my husand who passed away recently, ɔod rest his soul—that we had ɔ come down here. Mr. Bowen, ou wouldn't believe how much I njoy the sun. Of course, you've ever been in Cricket Creek," she dded, which was true, of course. doubted very much if Art had ven *heard* of Cricket Creek.

Art looked as if he wanted to ıide. Mabel smiled brightly at ım, nodding her head pleasanty.

"Mabel," I said, "the job we have ɔpen entails keeping our personıel files up to date. Quite a bit of work, you know, in an office this ize."

"Really?"

"Really. Even requires a bit of yping. You *can* type?"

"Oh, heavens, yes. Would you ike me to take a test?"

"Uh . . . yes, that might be a good dea. Let's go find a typewriter. Coming, Art?"

He grinned. "Wouldn't miss it or the world."

We walked out of the office. Art whispered in my ear, "Maybe ten words a minute would be my guess."

It turned out to be more like 90. I handed Mabel one of our surveys on employee retention and told her to have a go at it. She handled the typewriter like a machine gun. The carriage kept clicking back and forth so fast that Art almost got himself a sore neck watching the keys fly.

Our applicant handed me three pages. I couldn't find a single error. Art looked over each page as if he were examining the paper for fingerprints. He finally gave up, shaking his head.

Mabel went back to my office. Art and I walked over to a corner, Art holding the typed sheets.

"Well, what do you think?" he asked.

"She's the best typist in the building. Without a doubt."

"She's different. But you're right. Check her references. "

"And if they check out?"

He shrugged. "Let's hire ourselves a little old lady from Cricket Creek."

Art poked his head in my door the next day. "What about our typewriter whiz?"

"I just called her. Application checked out perfectly."

He laughed. "I bet she raises a few eyebrows," which wasn't a bad prediction at all.

Within two months Mabel Jump-

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stone was the most popular employee in the building. Anytime someone had a birthday she brought in a cake and served it during the afternoon break. She never failed to make announcements over the company P.A. system when she learned about new benefits. People with problems started coming to Mabel. She arrived early each morning and stayed late. She never missed a day of work. Not one.

Six months after we hired her, Art walked slowly into my office. His eyes were glassy and his mouth was slack. He plunked down heavily in a chair.

"What's the matter with you?" I asked.

"The cash mail," he groaned. We receive quite a lot of cash from our customers. Once a week, on Friday, we take it to the bank. It was Friday.

"What about the cash mail, Art? Come on, what's the matter?"

He looked at me, his eyes blinking. "Harvey was taking it to the bank. He called ten minutes ago. He was robbed. Conked. Knocked out. And guess who did it?"

"Who?"

"Mabel. Mabel Jumpstone. Our little old lady."

"You're kidding. You've got to be *kidding*, Art."

He shook his head. "Harvey said she wanted a lift to the bank. After they got going she took a pistol out of her handbag and told him to pull over. Harvey said looked like a cannon. The gur I mean. He just woke up. Th money and Harvey's car are gone So's Mabel."

I stared at him. "I can't believ it!"

"It's true. Every word. What ar we going to do?"

I snapped my fingers. "The ap plication! Come on."

We ran to the file cabinets an opened the one labeled *'Employee* The application was gone, o course. There was a single shee inside her manila folder. It wa typed very neatly. "I resign. Sin cerely yours, Mabel." The nam had been typed too. There was n handwritten signature. Mabel hac never written anything. She alway insisted on everything being typed

Art stared at me. "Do you re member anything on the applica tion? Anything? The references?' He was pleading.

"For Pete's sake, Art, it was si months ago!" I paused for a mo ment. "I can remember *one* thing Just one."

"What?"

"She came from Cricket Creek I wonder if there *is* a Cricke Creek?"

We checked.

There wasn't.

I finally got home to my two bedroom bachelor apartment late that evening. The police had been sympathetic. Real nice to us. They

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didn't even laugh when we told them they were after a little old lady of 55. They asked for a photograph or a sample of handwriting.

We didn't have either.

I opened a can of beer and then walked into one of the bedrooms.

Mabel was sitting on the bed, neatly counting the $78,000 into two separate piles.

I looked at her, smiled, and said, "Hi, Mom."

MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE

by LEN GRAY

THE HOUSE LOOKED THE SAME. After six months I suppose I didn't expect it to look any different. The lawn needed a haircut, but that didn't prove a thing, other than the fact Pop is lazy as hell.

I opened the screen door, which was having a hard time staying up on one hinge. They were all waiting in the front room. Martha Figtree jumped up off the couch and collapsed against me in a bear hug. "Johnnie! Welcome home, son."

I have to explain about Martha. She's lived next door to us as long as I can remember, which goes back about 25 years. Her husband died before they could have any kids, so I became her "son." Since I never knew my own mother it worked out all right. She's harmless, except of course for her fudge.

She stuck out a chubby palm. "I made some special for you, Johnnie." It was the fudge. I took a couple of pieces. It tasted just about the same. Kind of a cross between burnt cardboard and turpentine.

I smiled at her. "Great stuff, Martha. As usual."

She beamed all the way back across the room to the couch. I walked over and shook hands with my father. He hugged me and

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pounded me on the back. "Good to see you home, son," he said, grinning. His eyes looked a little red like maybe he'd been watching too many late late shows on TV.

Pop's all right. Parents always brag about what a great relationship they have with their kids. Pop and I aren't like that. We keep our mouths shut about our feelings. Never have seen any sense in showing off to the neighbors. Pop and I do a lot of things together. Every Friday night we look for a Western down at one of the local theaters. Pop likes to see an unsuspecting tribe of Indians get the hell beat out of 'em by the Sheriff, the posse, the hero, or whoever else is beating up Indians that particular week.

I sat down on the couch between Martha and my father. Pop moved his thin body over to make room for my bulk. Pop needs to put on some weight and get his teeth fixed. I looked over at Dave Garrits, who was sitting on one of those big floor pillows and was looking nervous. He had a long-haired woman next to him. She reminded me of Joan Crawford in one of her old movies.

"How's it going, Dave?" I asked.

"Fine. Just fine, Johnnie."

Dave is the local Sheriff. He does a pretty fair job in a town that shows a marked disinterest toward law enforcement. Industrial areas are usually that way from what I hear.

"Johnnie," said Dave, "this is my wife, Pearl." We said hello. She had a voice like a stranded frog. Deep and croaky. We made a few more remarks before Dave got down to it.

"You know how sorry I am, Johnnie. I try to do my job the best I can. I take a lot of time before I make up my mind about something."

Martha sniffed. I noticed she wasn't handing out any fudge to Dave or his wife. I guess they weren't up at the top of her list. At least as far as fudge goes. "Dave Garrits, you sure must have made a hasty decision about Johnnie. Imagine! How you could think this boy could steal anything is beyond me. I told you he didn't do it! Didn't I?" Martha was warmed up pretty good.

Dave waved a weary hand in the air. "I know, Mrs. Figtree, I know. You must have told me a thousand times."

"Don't you get smart with me, young man! I'll call the police!" Good old Martha. Always right on top of things. I reminded her that Dave *was* the police. Pop chuckled out loud, showing off his bad teeth.

Dave looked pained. "Okay, okay. I was wrong."

Pop jumped in. "We know that. Only problem is that while you were wrong, sitting in that plush

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office of yours, my boy was breaking rocks at the State Pen!"

Pearl croaked, "Mr. Carter, I want you to know how much this has bothered my husband. That's why I came over here with him this morning. Dave hasn't had a good night's sleep for a week. Ever since we found out your son didn't take the payroll, Dave has regretted every waking minute."

Pop smiled at her. When Pop smiles at a woman he's usually ready to smack her one in the chops. "Mrs. Garrits, how much sleep do you think my boy got on a prison bunk? Six months he spent in the Pen. And you tell me I should feel sorry for your poor husband? Listen—"

I raised my hands and yelled, "Hold it, hold it! This isn't doing anybody any good at all. Let's all pull in our fangs and relax." I could see everybody lean back a little. "There. That's more like it. First of all, nobody seems to be interested in how *I* feel about all this. If you people remember, *I'm* the one who's spent the last six months in jail."

I noticed Dave wince at the mention of jail.

"Dave," I said, "I don't hold anything against you."

He looked at me, his mouth open, his eyes wide. "You *don't?*"

"No, why should I? Like you said, you were trying to do your job. I don't think anybody can fault you for that. Also, let's face it, you had that eyewitness who said she saw me running off with the money. What's the story on her, Dave? What happened to her?"

Dave looked relieved. I guess he figured I had come home to throw bricks at his glass house. "Appreciate your attitude, Johnnie. Real nice of you."

"About the woman?" I reminded him.

"Yeah. Mrs. Draper. Well, as you remember, she picked your face out of one of the high-school yearbooks. Common procedure. We do it all the time when the mug shots don't come up with anything. Well, after we turned up Fletcher we had her take a look at him. You see, we didn't have a picture of him in the first place because he'd never been arrested. Just another drunk.

"Anyway, Mrs. Draper was amazed at the likeness between you and Fletcher. Admitted right off it could have been him instead of you. After a while she came right out and said it *must* have been him. She was real sorry about the wrong make on you. I told her it's happened before and it has. Of course, the serial numbers on the bills clinched it."

Martha handed me a trayful of fudge and asked Dave, "Well, why in the world didn't you people check out all the bums in town *before* you went ahead and arrested Johnnie?"

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Dave's face looked like a ripe pomegranate. "We *did*. But we missed Fletcher. He must have holed up in his hotel room night after the payroll heist. If he hadn't been killed, Johnnie would still be in jail."

Pearl Garrits tugged at her husband's arm. "Tell Johnnie how you traced those bills to Fletcher." She sounded real proud of her husband. She should have been. I glanced over at Pop who was taking all this in with a big grin on his lined face.

"Yeah," Dave said. "Well, after Johnnie went to prison, his dad was down to my office almost every day. He kept telling me over and over that Johnnie didn't do it. Mrs. Figtree kept calling and—uh—told me how she felt." I noticed Martha glaring at Dave. I would like to have heard their conversations. I nibbled on a piece of fudge and waited for Dave to continue.

"Finally, I started to wonder about the whole thing myself. It didn't seem right. Johnnie had never been in any trouble before. Even though you were unemployed, Johnnie, I checked around and found out you'd been looking for work. It didn't figure a man who was planning on stealing nearly $100,000 would be out trying to find a job. So I sent out a list of the serial numbers of the bills from the payroll—spread 'em all over town."

"Does the company always take down the serial numbers of the payroll?" I asked.

Dave nodded. "Usually. To protect themselves against something like this. When Fletcher fell out of his hotel-room window he solved our problem. We found nearly two hundred dollars on him and about a thousand in his room. The numbers matched."

Pop stirred beside me. "What about the rest of the money?"

Dave shrugged. "Who knows? He probably squirreled it away somewhere. It may turn up. Anyway, the people at the plant have collected the insurance money. It was Fletcher's drinking problem that did him in. If he hadn't been drunk he wouldn't have fallen out of the window and Johnnie'd still be in jail. I'm sure glad it turned out the way it did."

We all agreed on that. Fletcher didn't have any relatives, so he'd been buried in Potter's Field at the city's expense.

Everyone wanted to know what Pop and I were going to do now that I was out. We told them we wanted to think about it for a while. Might even take a trip if we could scrape up a few bucks. After an hour or so they all left so that Pop and I could be alone.

We sat on the couch looking at each other. I patted him on the shoulder and he grinned. We got up and I followed him to the basement.

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The rest of the money was all there in the suitcase. Pop had collected the suitcase the day before. I had buried it up by the lake. Nobody ever goes to Lake Russell any more, except runaway kids and lost tourists.

And thieves.

I slapped my old man on the back. "Have any trouble with Fletcher?"

"Naw. Sorry it took so long to find somebody who looked enough like you."

"Forget it. I was afraid you might have a few problems."

Pop chuckled. "Hell, no, son. He pushed real easy."

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Clark, Douglas	NOBODY'S PERFECT	Stein & Day	$ 4.95	7/28
Lange, John	THE VENOM BUSINESS	World Publishing Co.	5.95	7/15
Queen, Ellery	ELLERY QUEEN'S MURDER MENU	World Publishing Co.	6.95	7/7

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AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Eberhart, Mignon G.	RUN SCARED	Popular Library	.60	7/22
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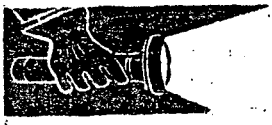

BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by JOHN DICKSON CARR

This column is written by one who loves mystery stories, in the hope and belief that you share the same fondness. Often, however, we encounter readers who in their hearts can't really like mysteries at all, no matter how many they may read. To praise a given story, for instance, they will cry with glee that the mystery is its least important part. They then wax ecstatic about depth of characterization, power of writing, and other qualities wholly admirable but of secondary importance to a strong plot. Such readers are best served by the kind of mystery writer, would-be highbrow, who can't much be bothered with plotting. And this genius exhibits great resentment when mystery lovers call for a mystery.

"Though you've ordered ham and eggs," he barks angrily, "I offer you a very superior dish of *truffes italiennes au beurre.* Why the hell can't you eat that and be content?"

Well, we are not content. Ham and eggs may be plebeian, indigestible, unworthy of a gourmet's palate; aesthetic souls forever tell us so. But it's ham and eggs we want, and this humble fare can be so well prepared that a man of healthy appetite will prefer it to the fanciest kickshaw on the menu.

Let's drop our culinary metaphor. For about six weeks I have waded through so many inept romances masquerading as mysteries—they think they can get away with anything if they call the result 'suspense'—that it has taken longer than usual to find four recommended titles. And too much space has been devoted to griping; the four titles can't be treated as fully as they deserve. Nevertheless, here they are: one top-notch detective novel, one hypnotic mystery-adventure, two spy thrillers of the true vintage. Curtain up!

In **Shotgun,** by Ed McBain (Doubleday, $4.95), a reliable old pro shows how it's done. When the prosperous tractor salesman and his wife are messily blasted with a shotgun, after the knifing of one harmless victim whom nobody should have touched, reliable old friends—Steve Carella, Bert Kling, Meyer Meyer of the 87th Precinct—tackle dirty work far more intricate and tricky than it seems, with neat, legitimate misdirection at every turn. The boys of the 87th sometimes yearn for

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the slippery sort of master criminal they meet in fiction not realizing they've found him until that last deadly confrontation at the bank. Mr. McBain, though displaying all the clues, can land a surprise haymaker with nearly every book. I am happy to report he *almost* knocked me cold.

Simon Algive, former bomb disposal officer of the Royal Navy and of **The Wave Hangs Dark,** by Alan Dipper (Morrow, $4.95), joins his old service pal to dive for hidden treasure aboard a bomb-laden cargo boat sunk in the Thames Estuary during World War II. The treasure is there, as well as bombs still untriggered. With ruthless opponents trying to anticipate them, with doubts of their own leader, mysterious Herr Garrolain, with potentally the most dangerous bomb a sex-bomb named Elise, our adventurers get so many shocks that they expect only the unexpected. That goes for the reader too. Alan Dipper, though new to mystery-adventure, has set off a high explosive charge at his first try.

Since my favorite secret agent is sardonic Matt Helm, as good a fellow off duty as seasoned professional killer on duty, I followed him with great pleasure through **The Interlopers,** by Donald Hamilton (Fawcett, 75¢), twelfth of these excellent paperback originals in the cloak-and-dagger line. On previous missions Matt has battled Soviet agents all over the American southwest, using gun or knife when needful, with a tolerant boss to clean up corpses afterwards. On this occasion Red interlopers, two different kinds of enemy, trail him all over the northwest, across Canada into the forty-ninth state. Disguised as sporting fisherman with dog, he must take out the Kremlin's top killer and forestall the assassination of whomever may be elected president. Not surprisingly, three attractive women haunt his path; but, surprisingly, one of them is honest. Forget the grotesque Matt Helm they have put into films. The real Matt Helm, whom you meet here, is the best in the business.

Another engaging series character, Dr. Jason Love, again flies high in James Leasor's **Passport for a Pilgrim,** (Doubleday, $4.95). Though only a hard-working British g.p., Dr. Love found his destiny several books ago. He can't take the most innocent trip abroad without walking straight into some espionage plot which inspires him to behave as no country doctor should. Visiting Damascus for a medical convention, Dr. Love breaks into a hospital, rescues a girl who's supposed to be dead, and kites off with her towards the literally blazing finale at a Moslem monastery. He is always hoping his patients at home won't hear of such unseemly goings-on. But irreverent readers, including your obedient servant, can never be sufficiently thankful.

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a HERCULE POIROT story by

AGATHA CHRISTIE

What is a perfect murder? A murder that is not even known to have been committed? A murder that is known to have occurred but has remained unsolved?

Neither is a correct definition, says Hercule Poirot (and surely he ought to know!). The little man of the little gray cells believes that a murder can be known to have been committed, that the identity of the murderer can also be known—and yet the murder can be a perfect one!

Let Hercule Poirot demonstrate in one of his greatest feats of deduction . . .

THE MYSTERY OF THE BAGDAD CHEST

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

THE WORDS MADE A CATCHY headline, and I said as much to my friend, Hercule Poirot. I knew none of the persons involved. My interest was merely the dispassionate one of the man in the street. Poirot agreed.

"Yes, it has a flavor of the Oriental, of the mysterious. The chest may very well have been a sham Jacobean one from the Tottenham Court Road; none the less, the reporter who thought of naming it the Bagdad Chest was happily inspired. The word 'Mystery' is also thoughtfully placed in juxtaposition, though I understand there is very little mystery about the case."

"Exactly. It is all rather horrible and macabre, but it is not mysterious."

"Horrible and macabre," repeated Poirot thoughtfully.

"The whole idea is revolting," I said, rising to my feet and pacing up and down the room. "The murderer kills this man—his friend—shoves him into the chest, and half an hour later is

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dancing in that same room with the wife of his victim. Think! If she had imagined for one moment—"

"True," said Poirot thoughtfully. "That much-vaunted possession, a woman's intuition—it does not seem to have been working."

"The party seems to have gone off very merrily," I said with a slight shiver. "And all that time, as they danced and played poker, there was a dead man in the room with them. One could write a play about such an idea."

"It has been done," said Poirot. "But console yourself, Hastings," he added kindly. "Because a theme has been used once, there is no reason why it should not be used again. Compose your drama."

I had picked up the paper and was studying the rather blurred reproduction of a photograph.

"She must be a beautiful woman," I said slowly. "Even from this, one gets an idea."

Below the picture ran the inscription:

A Recent Portrait of Mrs. Clayton, the Wife of the Murdered Man

Poirot took the paper from me.

"Yes," he said. "She is beautiful. Doubtless she is of those born to trouble the souls of men."

He handed the paper back to me with a sigh.

"*Dieu merci,* I am not of an ardent temperament. It has saved me from many embarrassments. I am duly thankful."

I do not remember that we discussed the case further. Poirot displayed no special interest in it at the time. The facts were so clear, there was so little ambiguity about them, that discussion seemed merely futile.

Mr. and Mrs. Clayton and Major Rich were friends of fairly long standing. On the day in question, the tenth of March, the Claytons had accepted an invitation to spend the evening with Major Rich. At about seven thirty, however, Clayton explained to another friend, a Major Curtiss, with whom he was having a drink, that he had been unexpectedly called to Scotland and was leaving by the eight o'clock train.

"I'll just have time to drop in and explain to old Jack," went on Clayton. "Marguerita is going, of course. I'm sorry about it, but Jack will understand how it is."

Mr. Clayton was as good as his word. He arrived at Major Rich's rooms about twenty to eight. The major was out at the time, but his manservant, who knew Mr. Clayton well, suggested that he come in and wait. Mr. Clayton said that he had not time, but that he would come in and write a note. He added that he was on his way to catch a train.

The valet accordingly showed him into the sitting room.

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About five minutes later Major Rich, who must have let himself in without the valet hearing him, opened the door of the sitting room, called his man, and told him to go out and get some cigarettes. On his return the man brought them to his master, who was then alone in the sitting room. The man naturally concluded that Mr. Clayton had left.

The guests arrived shortly afterward. They comprised Mrs. Clayton, Major Curtiss, and a Mr. and Mrs. Spence. The evening was spent dancing to the phonograph and playing poker. The guests left shortly after midnight.

The following morning, on coming to do the sitting room, the valet was startled to find a deep stain discoloring the carpet below and in front of a piece of furniture which Major Rich had brought from the East and which was called the Bagdad Chest.

Instinctively the valet lifted the lid of the chest and was horrified to find inside the doubled-up body of a man who had been stabbed to the heart.

Terrified, the man ran out of the flat and fetched the nearest policeman. The dead man proved to be Mr. Clayton. The arrest of Major Rich followed very shortly afterward. The major's defense, it was understood, consisted of a sturdy denial of everything. He had not seen Mr. Clayton the preceding evening and the first he had heard of his going to Scotland had been from Mrs. Clayton.

Such were the bald facts of the case. Innuendoes and suggestions naturally abounded. The close friendship and intimacy of Major Rich and Mrs. Clayton were so stressed that only a fool could fail to read between the lines. The motive of the crime was plainly indicated.

Long experience had taught me to make allowance for baseless calumny. The motive suggested might, for all the evidence, be entirely nonexistent. Some other reason might have precipitated the crime. But one thing did stand out clearly—that Rich was the murderer.

As I say, the matter might have rested there had it not happened that Poirot and I were due at a party given by Lady Chitterton that night.

Poirot, while bemoaning social engagements and declaring a passion for solitude, really enjoyed these affairs enormously. To be made a fuss of and treated as a lion suited him to the ground.

On occasions he positively purred! I have seen him blandly receiving the most outrageous compliments as no more than his due, and uttering the most blatantly conceited remarks, such I can hardly bear to set down.

Sometimes he would argue with me on the subject.

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"But, my friend, I am not an Anglo-Saxon. Why should I play the hypocrite? *Si, si,* that is what you do, all of you. The airman who has made a difficult flight, the tennis champion—they look down their noses, they mutter inaudibly that 'it is nothing.' But do they really think that themselves? Not for a moment. They would admire the exploit in someone else. So, being reasonable men, they admire it in themselves. But their training prevents them from saying so.

"Me, I am not like that. The talents that I possess—I would salute them in another. As it happens, in my own particular line, there is no one to touch me. *C'est dommage!* As it is, I admit freely and without the hypocrisy that I am a great man. I have the order, the method and the psychology in an unusual degree. I am, in fact, Hercule Poirot! Why should I turn red and stammer and mutter into my chin that really I am very stupid? It would not be true."

"There is certainly only one Hercule Poirot," I agreed—not without a spice of malice, of which, fortunately, Poirot remained quite oblivious.

Lady Chitterton was one of Poirot's most ardent admirers. Starting from the mysterious conduct of a Pekingese, he had unraveled a chain which led to a noted burglar and housebreaker. Lady Chitterton had been loud in his praises ever since.

To see Poirot at a party was a great sight. His faultless evening clothes, the exquisite set of his white tie, the exact symmetry of his hair parting, the sheen of pomade on his hair, and the tortured splendor of his famous mustache—all combined to paint the perfect picture of an inveterate dandy. It was hard, at these moments, to take the man seriously.

It was about half-past eleven when Lady Chitterton, bearing down on us, whisked Poirot neatly out of an admiring group, and carried him off—I need hardly say, with myself in tow.

"I want you to go into my little room upstairs," said Lady Chitterton rather breathlessly as soon as she was out of earshot of her other guests. "You know where it is, M. Poirot. You'll find someone there who needs your help very badly—and you will help her, I know. She's one of my dearest friends—so don't say no."

Energetically leading the way as she talked, Lady Chitterton flung open a door, exclaiming as she did so, "I've got him, Marguerita darling. And he'll do anything you want. You *will* help Mrs. Clayton, won't you, M. Poirot?"

And taking the answer for granted, she withdrew with the same energy that characterized all her movements.

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Mrs. Clayton had been sitting in a chair by the window. She rose now and came toward us. Dressed in deep mourning, the dull black showed up her fair coloring. She was a singularly lovely woman, and there was about her a simple childlike candor which made her charm quite irresistible.

"Alice Chitterton is so kind," she said. "She arranged this. She said you would help me, M. Poirot. Of course I don't know whether you will or not—but I hope you will."

She had held out her hand and Poirot had taken it. He held it now for a moment or two while he stood scrutinizing her closely. There was nothing ill-bred in his manner. It was more the kind but searching look that a famous consultant gives a new patient as the latter is ushered into his presence.

"Are you sure, madame," he said at last, "that I can help you?"

"Alice says so."

"Yes, but I am asking you."

"I don't know what you mean."

"What is it, madame, that you want me to do?"

"You—you—know who I am?" she asked.

"Assuredly."

"Then you can guess what it is I am asking you to do, M. Poirot—Captain Hastings"—I was gratified that she realized my identity—"Major Rich did *not* kill my husband."

"Why not?" Poirot asked.

"I beg your pardon?"

Poirot smiled at her slight discomfiture.

"I said, 'Why not?'" he repeated.

"I'm not sure that I understand."

"Yet it is very simple. The police—the lawyers—they will all ask the same question: Why did Major Rich kill M. Clayton? I ask the opposite. I ask you, madame, why did Major Rich *not* kill Major Clayton?"

"You mean—why I'm so sure? Well, but I *know*. I know Major Rich so well."

"You know Major Rich so well," repeated Poirot tonelessly.

The color flamed into her cheeks.

"Yes, that's what they'll say, what they'll think! Oh, I know!"

"*C'est vrai*. That is what they will ask you about—how well you knew Major Rich. Perhaps you will speak the truth, perhaps you will lie. It is very necessary for a woman to lie sometimes. Women must defend themselves—and the lie, it is a good weapon. But there are three people, madame, to whom a woman should speak the truth. To her father confessor, to her hairdresser, and to her private detective—if she trusts him. Do you trust me, madame?"

Marguerita Clayton drew a deep breath. "Yes," she said. "I do. I must," she added.

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"Then, how well do you know Major Rich?"

She looked at him for a moment in silence, then she raised her chin defiantly.

"I will answer your question. I loved Jack from the first moment I saw him—two years ago. Lately I think—I believe—he has come to love me. But he has never said so."

"*Epatant!*" said Poirot. "You have saved me a good quarter of an hour by coming to the point without beating the bush. You have good sense. Now did your husband suspect your feelings?"

"I don't know," said Marguerita slowly. "I thought—lately—that he might. His manner has been different ... But that may have been merely my fancy."

"Nobody else knew?"

"I do not think so."

"And—pardon me, madame—you did not love your husband?"

There were, I think, very few women who would have answered that question as simply as this woman did. They would have tried to explain their feelings.

Marguerita Clayton said quite simply, "No."

"*Bien.* Now we know where we are. According to you, madame, Major Rich did not kill your husband, but you realize that all the evidence points to his having done so. Are you aware, privately, of any flaw in that evidence?"

"No. I know nothing."

"When did your husband first inform you of his visit to Scotland?"

"Just after lunch. He said it was a bore, but he'd have to go. Something to do with land values, he said."

"And after that?"

"He went out—to his club, I think. I—I didn't see him again."

"Now as to Major Rich—what was his manner that evening? Just as usual?"

"Yes, I think so."

"You are not sure?"

Marguerita wrinkled her brows.

"He was a little constrained. With *me*—not with the others. But I thought I knew why that was. You understand? I am sure the constraint or—or—absent-mindedness perhaps describes it better—had nothing to do with Edward. He was surprised to hear that Edward had gone to Scotland, but not unduly so."

"And nothing else unusual occurs to you in connection with that evening?"

Marguerita thought.

"No, nothing whatever."

"You noticed the chest?"

She shook her head with a little shiver.

"I don't even remember it—or what it was like. We played poker most of the evening."

"Who won?"

"Major Rich. I had very bad luck, and so did Major Curtiss.

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The Spences won a little, but Major Rich was the chief winner."

"The party broke up—when?"

"About half-past twelve, I think. We all left together."

"Ah!"

Poirot remained silent, lost in thought.

"I wish I could be more helpful to you," said Mrs. Clayton. "I seem to be able to tell you so little."

"About the present—yes. What about the past, madame?"

"The past?"

"Yes. Have there not been incidents?"

She flushed.

"You mean that dreadful little man who shot himself. It wasn't my fault, M. Poirot. Indeed it wasn't."

"It was not precisely of that incident that I was thinking."

"That ridiculous duel? But Italians do fight duels. I was so thankful the man wasn't killed."

"It must have been a relief to you," agreed Poirot gravely.

She was looking at him doubtfully. He rose and took her hand in his.

"I shall not fight a duel for you, madame," he said. "But I will do what you have asked me. I will discover the truth. And let us hope that your instincts are correct—that the truth will help and not harm you."

Our first interview was with Major Curtiss. He was a man of about forty, of soldierly build, with very dark hair and a bronzed face. He had known the Claytons for some years and Major Rich also. He confirmed the press reports.

Clayton and he had had a drink together at the club just before half-past seven, and Clayton had then announced his intention of looking in on Major Rich on his way to Euston.

"What was Mr. Clayton's manner? Was he depressed or cheerful?"

The major considered. He was a slow-spoken man.

"Seemed in fairly good spirits," he said at last.

"He said nothing about being on bad terms with Major Rich?"

"Good Lord, no. They were pals."

"He didn't object to his wife's friendship with Major Rich?"

The major became very red in the face.

"You've been reading those damned newspapers, with their hints and lies. Of course he didn't object. Why, he said to me, 'Marguerita's going, of course.'"

"I see. Now during the evening—the manner of Major Rich—was that much as usual?"

"I didn't notice any difference."

"And madame? She, too, was as usual?"

"Well," he reflected, "now I come to think of it, she was a

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bit quiet. You know, thoughtful and faraway."

"Who arrived first?"

"The Spences. They were there when I got there. As a matter of fact, I'd called round for Mrs. Clayton, but found she'd already started. So I got there a bit late."

"And how did you amuse yourselves? You danced? You played the cards?"

"A bit of both. Danced first."

"There were five of you?"

"Yes, but that's all right, because I don't dance. I put on the records and the others danced."

"Who danced most with whom?"

"Well, as a matter of fact the Spences like dancing together. They've got a sort of craze on it—fancy steps and all that."

"So that Mrs. Clayton danced mostly with Major Rich?"

"That's about it."

"And then you played poker?"

"Yes."

"And when did you leave?"

"Oh, quite early. A little after midnight."

"Did you all leave together?"

"Yes. As a matter of fact, we shared a taxi, dropped Mrs. Clayton first, then me, and the Spences took it on to Kensington."

Our next visit was to Mr. and Mrs. Spence. Only Mrs. Spence was at home, but her account of the evening tallied with that of Major Curtiss except that she displayed a slight acidity concerning Major Rich's luck at cards.

Earlier in the morning Poirot had had a telephone conversation with Inspector Japp, of Scotland Yard. As a result, we arrived at Major Rich's rooms and found his manservant, Burgoyne, expecting us.

The valet's evidence was precise and clear.

Mr. Clayton had arrived at twenty minutes to eight. Unluckily Major Rich had just that very minute gone out. Mr. Clayton had said that he couldn't wait, as he had to catch a train, but he would just scrawl a note. He accordingly went into the sitting room to do so. Burgoyne had not actually heard his master come in, as he was running the bath, and Major Rich, of course, let himself in with his own key.

In the valet's opinion it was about ten minutes later that Major Rich called him and sent him out for cigarettes. No, he had not gone into the sitting room. Major Rich had stood in the doorway. He had returned with the cigarettes five minutes later and on this occasion he had gone into the sitting room, which was then empty, save for his master, who was standing by the window smoking.

His master had inquired if his bath were ready and on being told it was, had proceeded to take it. He, Burgoyne, had not mentioned Mr. Clayton, as he assumed that

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his master had found Mr. Clayton there and let him out himself. His master's manner had been precisely the same as usual. He had taken his bath, changed, and shortly after, Mr. and Mrs. Spence had arrived, to be followed by Major Curtiss and Mrs. Clayton.

It had not occurred to him, Burgoyne explained, that Mr. Clayton might have left before his master's return. To do so, Mr. Clayton would have had to bang the front door behind him and that the valet was sure he would have heard.

Still in the same impersonal manner, Burgoyne proceeded to his finding of the body. For the first time my attention was directed to the fatal chest. It was a good-sized piece of furniture standing against the wall next to the phonograph cabinet. It was made of some dark wood and plentifully studded with brass nails. The lid opened simply enough. I looked in and shivered. Though well scrubbed, ominous stains remained.

Suddenly Poirot uttered an exclamation. "Those holes there—they are curious. One would say that they had been newly made."

The holes in question were at the back of the chest against the wall. There were four of them, about a quarter of an inch in diameter.

Poirot bent down to examine them, looking inquiringly at the valet.

"It's certainly curious, sir. I don't remember ever seeing those holes in the past, though maybe I wouldn't notice them."

"It makes no matter," said Poirot.

Closing the lid of the chest, he stepped back into the room until he was standing with his back against the window. Then he suddenly asked a question.

"Tell me," he said. "When you brought the cigarettes into your master that night, was there not something out of place in the room?"

Burgoyne hesitated for a minute, then with some slight reluctance he replied, "It's odd your saying that, sir. Now you come to mention it, there was. That screen there that cuts off the draft from the bedroom door—it was moved a bit more to the left."

"Like this?"

Poirot darted nimbly forward and pulled at the screen. It was a handsome affair of painted leather. It already slightly obscured the view of the chest, and as Poirot adjusted it, it hid the chest altogether.

"That's right, sir," said the valet. "It was like that."

"And the next morning?"

"It was still like that. I remember. I moved it away and it was then I saw the stain. The carpet's gone to be cleaned, sir. That's

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why the boards are bare."

Poirot nodded.

"I see," he said. "Thank you."

He placed a crisp piece of paper in the valet's palm.

"Thank you, sir."

"Poirot," I said when we were out in the street, "that point about the screen—is that a point helpful to Rich?"

"It is a further point against him," said Poirot ruefully. "The screen hid the chest from the room. It also hid the stain on the carpet. Sooner or later the blood was bound to soak through the wood and stain the carpet. The screen would prevent discovery for the moment. Yes—but there is something I do not understand. The valet, Hastings, the valet."

"What about the valet? He seemed a most intelligent fellow."

"As you say, most intelligent. Is it credible, then, that Major Rich failed to realize that the valet would certainly discover the body in the morning? Immediately after the deed he had no time for anything—granted. He shoves the body into the chest, pulls the screen in front of it, and goes through the evening hoping for the best. But after the guests are gone? Surely, then is the time to dispose of the body."

"Perhaps he hoped the valet wouldn't notice the stain?"

"That, *mon ami,* is absurd. A stained carpet is the first thing a good servant would be bound to notice. And Major Rich, he goes to bed and snores there comfortably and does nothing at all about the matter. Very remarkable and interesting, that."

"Curtiss might have seen the stains when he was changing the records the night before?" I suggested.

"That is unlikely. The screen would throw a deep shadow just there. No, but I begin to see. Yes, dimly I begin to see."

"See what?" I asked eagerly.

"The possibilities, shall we say, of an alternative explanation. Our next visit may throw light on things."

Our next visit was to the doctor who had examined the body. His evidence was a mere recapitulation of what he had already given at the inquest. Deceased had been stabbed to the heart with a long thin knife something like a stiletto. The knife had been left in the wound. Death had been instantaneous. The knife was the property of Major Rich and usually lay on his writing table. There were no fingerprints on it, the doctor understood. It had been either wiped or held in a handkerchief. As regards time, any time between seven and nine seemed indicated.

"He could not, for instance, have been killed after midnight?" asked Poirot.

"No. That I can say. Ten o'clock at the outside—but seven

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thirty to eight seems clearly indicated."

"There *is* a second hypothesis possible," Poirot said when we were back home. "I wonder if you see it, Hastings. To me it is very plain, and I only need one point to clear up the matter for good and all."

"It's no good," I said. "I don't see it."

"But make an effort, Hastings. Make an effort."

"Very well," I said. "At seven forty Clayton is alive and well. The last person to see him alive is Rich—"

"So we assume."

"Well, isn't it so?"

"You forget, *mon ami*, that Major Rich denies that. He states explicitly that Clayton was gone when he came in."

"But the valet says that he would have heard Clayton leave because of the bang of the door. And also, if Clayton had left, when did he return? He couldn't have returned after midnight because the doctor says positively that he was dead at least two hours before that. That only leaves one alternative."

"Yes, *mon ami?*" said Poirot.

"That in the five minutes Clayton was alone in the sitting room, someone else came in and killed him. But there we have the same objection. Only someone with a key could come in without the valet's knowing, and in the same way the murderer on leaving would have had to bang the door, and that again the valet would have heard."

"Exactly," said Poirot. "And therefore—"

"And therefore—nothing," I said. "I can see no other solution."

"It is a pity," murmured Poirot. "And it is really so exceedingly simple—as the clear blue eyes of Madame Clayton."

"You really believe—"

"I believe nothing—until I have got proof. One little proof will convince me."

He took up the telephone and called Inspector Japp at Scotland Yard.

Twenty minutes later we were standing before a little heap of assorted objects laid out on a table. They were the contents of the dead man's pockets.

There was a handkerchief, a handful of loose change, a pocketbook containing three pounds ten shillings, a couple of bills, and a worn snapshot of Marguerita Clayton. There was also a pocketknife, a gold pencil, and a cumbersome wooden tool.

It was on this last that Poirot swooped. He unscrewed it and several small blades fell out.

"You see, Hastings, a gimlet and all the rest of it. Ah, it would be a matter of a very few minutes to bore a few holes in the chest with this."

"Those holes we saw?"

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"Precisely."

"You mean it was Clayton who bored them himself?"

"*Mais, oui—mais, oui!* What did they suggest to you, those holes? They were not to *see* through, because they were at the back of the chest. What were they for, then? Clearly for air? But you do not make air holes for a dead body—so clearly they were *not* made by the murderer. They suggest one thing—and one thing only—that a man was going to *hide* in that chest.

"And at once, on that hypothesis, things become intelligible. Mr. Clayton is jealous of his wife and Rich. He plays the old, old trick of pretending to go away. He watches Rich go out, then he gains admission, is left alone to write a note, quickly bores those holes, and then hides inside the chest. His wife is coming there that night. Possibly Rich will put the others off, possibly she will remain after the others have gone, or pretend to go and return. Whatever it is, Clayton will *know*. Anything is preferable to the ghastly suspicion he is enduring."

"Then you mean that Rich killed him *after* the others had gone? But the doctor said that was impossible."

"Exactly. So you see, Hastings, he must have been killed *during* the evening."

"But everyone was in the room!"

"Precisely," said Poirot gravely. "You see the beauty of that? 'Everyone was in the room.' What an alibi! What sangfroid—what nerve—what audacity!"

"I still don't understand."

"Who went behind that screen to wind up the phonograph and change the records? The phonograph and the chest were side by side, remember. The others are dancing—the phonograph is playing. And the man who does not dance lifts the lid of the chest and thrusts the knife he has just slipped into his sleeve deep into the body of the man who was hiding there."

"Impossible! The man would cry out."

"Not if he were drugged first?"

"Drugged?"

"Yes. Who did Clayton have a drink with at seven thirty? Ah! Now you see. Curtiss! Curtiss has inflamed Clayton's mind with suspicions against his wife and Rich. Curtiss suggests this plan—the visit to Scotland, the concealment in the chest, the final touch of moving the screen. Not so that Clayton can raise the lid a little and get relief—no, so that he, Curtiss, can raise the lid of that chest unobserved.

"The plan is Curtiss', and observe the beauty of it, Hastings. If Rich had observed that the screen was out of place and moved it back—well, no harm is done. He can make another plan. Clay-

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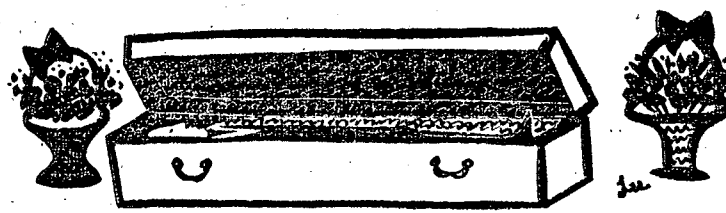
ton hides in the chest, the mild narcotic that Curtiss had administered takes effect. He sinks into unconsciousness. Curtiss lifts up the lid and strikes—and the phonograph goes on playing *Walking My Baby Back Home.*"

I found my voice. "Why? But why?"

Poirot shrugged. "Why did a man shoot himself? Why did two Italians fight a duel? Curtiss is of a dark passionate temperament. He wanted Marguerita Clayton. With her husband and Rich out of the way, she would, or so he thought, turn to him."

He added musingly, "These simple childlike women—they are very dangerous. But *mon Dieu!* What an artistic masterpiece! It goes to my heart to hang a man like that. I may be a genius myself, but I am capable of recognizing genius in other people. A perfect murder, *mon ami.* I, Hercule Poirot, say it to you. A perfect murder. *Epatant!*"



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a NEW crime story by

ROBERT TWOHY

Maybe it was destiny—on this particular Sunday afternoon in April ... another unusual and offbeat story by a writer whose work has a quality all its (and his) own ...

THE GINGHAM DOG AND THE CALICO CAT

by ROBERT TWOHY

IF A FLY HADN'T AGGRESSIVELY buzzed his sweaty face just as he came in the door, maybe it would have been all right. Maybe nothing violent would have happened—not that day, anyway. Or maybe it was his destiny—that on this particular Sunday afternoon in April, Harold Birnley should blow his stack.

Anyway, the fly *did* buzz; and Birnley, depressed by a bad golf score and half full of whiskey, blew. Yanking the golf bag from his shoulder, he snapped it so that clubs and balls rained about the living room.

No special damage was done, except by the driver which split the expensive antique mirror over the mantel.

Birnley advanced into the room and stood, hands on hips, his thick chest heaving, his beefy face lowered, staring at his distorted reflection. Somehow it was clear to him: it was all Elaine's fault.

"If you didn't let this house get infested by flies it might be a place a man would want to come home to on a Sunday afternoon!"

"What? What?" She had come into the room; her angular form was behind him in the mirror. He saw her mouth open, her eyes pop in an expression of horrified anger. Her hands went to her head. "*What* have you *done!*"

"I dropped my clubs." He grinned viciously at her in the glass. "Mainly because a horde of flies descended on me just as I opened the door!"

"Flies? I don't see any flies.

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Show me a fly, one fly!" Her voice was a rising whine.

He turned. "You've got nothing else to do but lie around all day, watching TV. Can't you get up at least long enough to walk around with a fly-spray can, for God's sake?"

She yelled, "You're drunk again, aren't you?"

"If I am there's plenty of reason for it! What *do* you do all day? That's always one of the great mysteries—what *do* you do all day?"

And they were off.

Next door on the right, in the expensive subdivision, lived the Ormonds. John Ormond was a lawyer—a thin man with a dark, somewhat sullen face.

He said, "There they go."

His wife Myra, sitting opposite him in the living room with her section of the Sunday paper, closed her eyes. "What did we do to deserve *them* as neighbors?"

The dull heavy yammer of Birnley's voice came to them dimly but nerve-rackingly; alternately the Ormonds could hear shrill outbursts from Birnley's wife.

Ormond got up, letting his paper billow to the floor. He jabbed a cigarette into his lips, snapped a table lighter at it, and paced.

"Every week-end. Without fail. No, I take that back. Last Christmas there was peace."

"That's because they were out of town."

"That's right. But they made up for it New Year's Eve."

He stopped, and threw his cigarette into the fireplace. "Damn it, before they moved in I used to *enjoy* the week-end. It was a time of relaxation. Now it's either listen to them fight, or wait for the fight to begin."

The wrangle went on; it made Ormond think of the sound of the dentist's drill. He even imagined a pain in his jaw.

Myra said, "One day he's going to kill her."

"Good thing if he does. Then maybe they'll take him away and hang him, and we'll have some peace."

If he was joking, his grim face didn't show it.

Myra said, "His wife's not much better than he is. She's always ready for a fight too. But he's the one who starts them. He's a born bully."

Ormond nodded. Once he had tried to talk to Birnley. That had been in November, shortly after the Birnleys had moved in. The fight had wakened Ormond at 2:00 A.M. He had lain listening for two hours, and had been unable to sleep the rest of the night. An important case the following day had gone against him, and he had attributed the defeat to lack of sharpness. Returning home that evening he had seen Birnley on the front lawn, practicing putts. Ormond had walked near.

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"Say, Birnley, I wonder if you realize how your voice carries."

"What was that?"

"Well, a nice domestic fight is okay, but can't you keep it in the family? I mean, you kept me awake all last night."

Birnley stared at him with his small pale-blue eyes; his heavy face flushed. "Is that right?"

"It is."

"Are you asking for trouble or something?"

"All I'm asking is that you show a little consideration for a neighbor."

Birnley looked at him, then slowly laid down his club; slowly he came over. Seeing the flushed, heavy face, the bright flat eyes, Ormond became uneasy; it struck him that Birnley might be a little mad.

Birnley said, "Do you always stick your nose into other people's business?"

"Not if they—"

"You're standing on my property. Get off my property."

Ormond retreated three steps until he was on his own grass.

Birnley said, his voice thick, his chest heaving, "Are you telling me how to behave in my own house?"

"No. All I'm telling you is—"

He had an impression of a blur moving toward him; he didn't feel a thing. The next thing he knew, he was lying on the grass, staring up. Birnley loomed over him; the thick lips were set in a tight grin.

Ormond wiped his mouth and saw blood on the side of his hand. Then he felt the pain.

He glanced around. Surprisingly, no one was standing gawking, no one seemed to have noticed.

He got up, dabbed his mouth with his handkerchief. "I could have you arrested for that."

"Try it, shyster. You were standing on my property, insulting me, refusing to move. You goaded me into it."

"I was on my own property."

"Prove it."

Ormond thought of the difficulty of proving it; he thought of the damage it would do to his work schedule to take on a legal hassle with Birnley. The latter was grinning, perhaps reading his thoughts.

Ormond said, his voice tight, "You'll pay for that punch."

Birnley called after him, "You mess in *my* business, fella, you'll get more than a split lip!"

From that time Ormond hadn't exchanged a word with his neighbor . . .

Myra said, "They've stopped."

He listened. He glanced at his watch. "Ten minutes. *That* was short."

They waited. The silence grew.

Myra said, "Maybe he killed her."

He raised his eyebrows, pursed his lips.

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"Maybe you ought to go over," Myra suggested hesitantly.

"Why should I? What's it to me?"

The phone rang.

She stared at her husband. "I have a feeling it's him." She sucked in her breath. "I have a feeling he *has* killed her."

Ormond picked up the phone. "Hello?"

Birnley's heavy voice said, "Ormond? This is Birnley. Listen, I've tried to get my lawyer, and then I remembered he's out of town. Can you come over?"

"What for?"

"Just come over."

"Like hell."

"Listen, Ormond. Listen, Elaine's—well, we had a fight, and she threw a vase at me, missed, and I slugged her . She's dead."

Ormond was silent.

His wife whispered, "What did he say? Did he say she was dead?"

Ormond nodded.

"I knew it!" She went and sat down.

Ormond said, "I'll come over," and hung up.

Myra asked, "How did it happen?"

Ormond repeated what Birnley had told him.

She breathed, "My God!"

"Wait here."

Ormond crossed the grass to Birnley's door which opened as he got there. Birnley, pale-faced, nodded, then stepped aside, and shut the door behind Ormond.

Ormond saw the scatter of clubs and the split mirror. Against one wall was the shattered vase. He saw the huddled form of Elaine Birnley, on her side, near the coffee table.

He bent and reached for her pulse; then he looked up. "How did it happen?"

"Like I said. We had a fight." Birnley paced heavily, kneading a fist with his other palm. "It built up. Suddenly she threw that vase, missed ... and then I blew. I hit her." He glanced at the hand he was kneadiing. "I didn't hit her very hard—I've hit her harder than that. I don't know why the hell—"

"You must have hit her in the temple."

"She's really dead, is she? Damn." He paced some more. "What a stinking bad break! Well, there's no use crying over spilt milk—what's done's done. Anyway, I've got a good lawyer, Jeff Short—you know him?"

"I know him."

"He's the best." Birnley nodded vigorously; he had brightened considerably as he talked. "I'll tell him the way it was, and he'll figure an angle. What do *you* think, Ormond? What do you think the best play would be?"

"I guess that's up to you and Short."

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"Yeah, but just off the top of your head—what do you think, two years? Maybe the fact that I boozed it up at the club pretty heavy—we can prove that—and all the other fights with Elaine, all the nagging I've had to put up with. Maybe, when she threw that vase, I had a blackout. Temporary insanity, maybe? Hell, I *could* possibly get off with a suspended sentence, right? I mean, isn't it possible?"

"It's possible." With Jeff Short anything was possible.

"Well, that's not so bad. I feel a lot better now. Hey, would you like a drink?"

"No." Ormond looked around at the scattered clubs. "You sure you didn't hit her with one of those?"

"What? Hell, no. Why should I?" He kneaded his fist again, and smirked at it with a certain self-satisfaction. "I don't need to use a club. I never have."

"Well, if I were you I'd pick them up, get them out of the way. No need to have the police see them."

"What? Oh, I see. I guess you're right. They might get an idea.

"They might." Ormond stooped and picked up a club. A 7-iron. "Get those over there," he said. "I'll pick up these."

Birnley crouched, gathering clubs. His broad head was turned from Ormond, some four feet away.

And suddenly a red rage overcame Ormond ...

His wife was waiting for him at the door. "Well?"

"She's dead."

"How?" There was an undercurrent of eagerness in her voice: "Where did he hit her?"

"I don't know." Ormond sat down. His face looked haggard. "Pour me a drink, will you?"

She hurried to do so, and brought it to him. He swallowed half of it. "All I know, she's lying there—and so is he."

"What!"

"They're both dead." He looked at her with strange eyes. "There must have been a wild fight. There are golf clubs all around. They must have battered each other."

She stared. "But—but—"

He finished his drink. Suddenly he gave a silly laugh. "Like the gingham dog and the calico cat—they ate each other up!"

She sat down. Her eyes were fixed on him. She whispered, "He called up!"

"What?"

"He called up! Don't you remember, he called and told you she was dead!"

"Who called?"

"And you went over—"

"Who called? Birnley? Birnley didn't call."

He shook his head, and smiled at her fixedly. "Don't *you* remember? The sounds stopped and you

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asked me to go over—and I did. The door was unlocked. I went in. I saw the scene—that's the way it happened. Now I've got to call the police."

She said, "Oh my God!" and put both hands to her face.

He looked at his glass a moment, then suddenly flung it into the fireplace, where it shattered. "Nobody," he said viciously, "*nobody* hits John Ormond in the mouth and gets away with it!"

She said, "You'll go to jail."

"What do you mean? There's no reason for the police to think that it was—"

"I called Jane Summers across the street—and Diane Charnley on the corner . . . told them about the phone call, told them what Birnley had said to you—"

He whispered, "You didn't!"

"I did."

"My God," he said. "You and your big mouth."

They sat there, staring at each other.

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a NEW Grandfather story by

LLOYD BIGGLE, JR.

We are happy to have a new detective story about Grandfather Rastin, the irascible, peppery, shrewd, bright-as-a-button octogenarian—in a phrase, Rastin the rustic rocking-chair unraveler. And in this puzzling mystery Grandfather locks horns and matches philosophies with a much younger and even cockier character, a man named Jim Davey who is the labor organizer for the International Brotherhood of Sand and Gravel Workers . . . a detective story with a sense of honor and a sense of humor . . .

GRANDFATHER AND THE AUTOMATION MYSTERY

by LLOYD BIGGLE, JR.

IN BORGVILLE, MICHIGAN, A NICE day in March usually doesn't last a whole day. This one held on for most of the afternoon, and when I came home from school my Grandfather Rastin had his rocking chair out on the porch, enjoying the sunshine. While I was giving him the latest scandal from Borgville High School—how one of the white mice in the science lab had a mixed brown and white litter and how Mr. Harwick was giving Jerry Ardnow an "F" for not conducting a properly controlled experiment—one of those funny little foreign cars came snuffing up the street and stopped in front of our house.

The man who got out was bald-headed and otherwise built just right for the car, but his face was a couple of sizes too small for his glasses. He stood there for a moment counting the houses from the corner to make certain he had the right one, and then he strutted up our walk and took the six front steps in three jumps.

He squinted at the two of us while fishing a piece of paper out of his pocket. "You're—" He held the paper at arm's length and focused his squint in that direction.

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"You're William Rastin?" He had a large voice that tapered away to a squeak at the end of a sentence.

Grandfather nodded.

"You're the one that's behind this idea about running a slate of college professors for county offices?"

"I am," Grandfather said. "I stand for intelligence in government."

"And just what will that solve?"

"Hard to say. It's never been tried before."

The stranger snorted. "Run anyone you please for office, that's not why I'm here. I've tried to get statements from the present officeholders, and they won't talk. Your professors referred me to you. What do you have to say about this?"

He passed a newspaper clipping to Grandfather, who glanced at it and handed it back. "Who are you?" he asked.

"Jim Davey. Organizer for the International Brotherhood of Sand and Gravel Workers. This is an outrage, and no one in Borg County seems to care. I want a statement from you in behalf of these eggheads you're running for political office."

"I see. Well. A statement? You may say that my slate of candidates stands firmly for the right of every man to have a job who wants one, and also for the right of any businessman to invest his capital according to his own best judgment."

"You can't have it both ways."

"Why not?"

"Because," Davey boomed, pointing a trembling finger, "automation is the curse of the workingman, and the workingman is going to do something about it. It's time the politicians woke up to the fact that workingmen vote and machines don't. Ten jobs eliminated, just like that!" He snapped his fingers. "Those ten men vote, and all of them have relatives who vote, and the relatives have relatives, and by the time I've finished, every workingman in this county is going to understand that he may be next. I'm telling you, election day in Borg County is going to be a day of judgment!"

"Did you ask Elmer Vaughan about this?"

"He laughed at me. Typical businessman attitude. Fire ten workers with families and replace them with a machine, and of course it's very funny."

"You're after the wrong politicians. What could the County Drain Commissioner do about a thing like this even if he wanted to?"

"Ha! If local politicians have guts and put the heat on the higherups, they can accomplish plenty. Want to change that statement?"

Grandfather shook his head.

"You won't elect any of your professors. Not one. I'll see to that."

He stomped down the steps, hit-

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ting each of them with a thump, and drove away.

"What was that all about?" I asked.

"I don't rightly know."

"What was in the clipping?"

"Says the oldest continuously operated gravel pit in the State of Michigan has succumbed to automation. It's owner, Elmer Vaughan, has acquired a new loader that will do the work of ten men. Borgville dateline. Strange."

"It's more than that," I said. "It's hilarious. This labor guy will have a great time tracking down the ten men the new loader's doing the work of. I never heard of Elmer Vaughan hiring even one man. Did you?"

"Not in the last thirty years. The strange thing is that Elmer could buy a new machine without it being talked about. Wish I'd thought to ask this fellow what newspaper that clipping is from. Things like that are usually picked up from local papers, but there hasn't been a whisper in the *Gazette*. Find out what Maggie knows about this."

Maggie Cross writes up the Borgville news for the *Borg County Gazette* and also for the Wiston *Journal* when the *Journal* wants any Borgville news, which isn't often. She's an invalid and has to do all her reporting from her bedroom, but no one has ever said she didn't do a thorough job. On account of that, and also because she is Elmer Vaughan's niece, she should have known about this new loader if anyone did.

When I reached her, she said she hadn't heard a thing and couldn't imagine where an out-of-town paper got such a story. She started asking me questions, as though she meant to write one herself, and I told her she'd better get her information from a more authoritative source, and hung up.

"She doesn't know anything about it," I told Grandfather. "A machine like that would be expensive. Where would old Elmer get the money?"

"He mortgaged his south forty a short time back. He'd maybe have enough for a down payment." Grandfather stepped up his rocking a notch. "But it doesn't make sense that it would get into an out-of-town paper when no one around here knows about it."

"Maybe the manufacturer told the paper."

"Maybe," Grandfather said, rocking faster. "The Borgville Service Station couldn't acquire a new tire gauge without me knowing about it. Why hasn't someone mentioned this machine of Elmer's?"

I didn't answer.

"Johnny, go over to Wiston and look through the Wiston *Journal*. The public library should have it."

"Now?"

He nodded. "Check back three or four weeks. While you're at it you might as well stop at Elmer's

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and have a look at that new loader."

I raised my nose and sniffed deeply. Mom was frying chicken for supper. "Now?" I asked again.

"Now."

I got my jalopy and went.

The Vaughan farm has a big old stone house and a much bigger stone barn. Old Elmer hasn't farmed for years. Joe Wills, his neighbor, rents the barn along with some of the land, so that's kept in real good condition. The house, where Elmer has lived alone since his wife died four years ago, is a mess.

No one came to the door and Elmer's car was gone, so I drove down the road to the entrance of the gravel pit. The gate was locked and there was a big *NO TRESPASSING* sign nailed to it. The lane didn't look as if much traffic had passed that way, but that wasn't surprising in March. It's a long way to the pit, which is out of sight behind a hill, and Elmer has been known to blaze away with a shotgun at trespassers, no questions asked.

I thought I knew a way to see the loader without walking all the way to the pit and maybe getting shot at, so I drove as far as the first crossroad, turned, and came to a sudden stop. Parked by the road a short distance from the corner was that funny foreign car of the labor organizer, Jim Davey.

Joe Wills was working there by the road, fixing fence, so I walked over to him. He grinned and pointed at the car. "Think maybe somebody's dog dragged that out here?"

With Mom's fried chicken waiting for me I wasn't about to waste time making crummy jokes. "Have you heard anything about this new loader of Elmer's?" I asked.

Joe shook his head. "I'm not old enough to remember when Elmer had anything new." He pointed at the car again. "Any idea who owns that thing?"

"A labor organizer," I said.

"That so? What's a labor organizer doing out here?"

As if to answer his question, from the direction of Elmer's gravel pit came a big *B-O-O-M!* I turned in time to see a conglomeration of wheels and rods and assorted unidentified parts fly into the air and go soaring off in all directions. Before either of us could say a word, Jim Davey came scooting along the road, jumped into his car, and drove away.

"Well, now you know what he was doing," I said. "And you saw what was left of Elmer's new loader."

"I'm going to call the Sheriff," Joe said. He ran for his house.

I drove over to Highway 27, stopped at the first filling station, and telephoned Grandfather. "I got there too late to see the loader," I said. "That labor organizer just blew it up."

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"Horsefeathers!"

"I saw it with my own eyes."

"I still don't believe it. Go on to Wiston and see if your eyes work any better on newspapers."

I went to Wiston and read through five weeks of the Wiston *Journal,* which is a shattering experience on an empty stomach. Wiston is the closest thing to a big city that Borg County has, and the Borgville housewives wouldn't wrap garbage in some of the things that get into the *Journal.* I wasn't about to have Grandfather making further remarks about my eyesight, so I looked carefully at every column of every page. Elmer's loader wasn't mentioned. For that matter, neither was Borgville. The people in Wiston like to pretend that Borgville doesn't exist.

When I got home Grandfather had taken his rocking chair upstairs, and he was rocking full speed with his door closed. I opened it long enough to tell him that I hadn't found anything, and all he did was grunt. Mom warmed up some chicken for me. Fred Devers, who runs the Borgville Motel, telephoned while I was eating. Grandfather had called him earlier to ask if Jim Davey was staying there, so he thought Grandfather would like to know that Davey came back and checked out without even using his room, and just as he was about to drive away one of Sheriff Pilkins' deputies drove up and arrested him.

Tuesday it rained. Grandfather was waiting for me on the porch when I got home, bundled up in his raincoat and rain hat and galoshes and carrying an umbrella. He got into my jalopy, growled, "Wiston," and glowered all the way there, with me wondering whether he was mad because of the weather or because he was about to see Sheriff Pilkins.

Finally I asked him, and he said, "I can't make head nor tail of this. For one thing, this labor organizer doesn't impress me as the type who blows up things. Even if he was he wouldn't go around announcing his presence and purpose ahead of time. For another thing, that newspaper story doesn't make any sense at all. I've got to talk with Davey."

"Better not tell the Sheriff that Davey isn't the type," I said. "Not unless you're willing to trade that rain hat for a crash helmet."

I expected another explosion when we walked in, but the Sheriff shook hands with both of us, invited us into his private office, offered a cigar to Grandfather, who doesn't smoke, and asked, "Do you have any idea how I can get that labor punk out of my hair?"

I looked at his hair. It's thinner than it was a few years ago, and the bald spot on top is getting bigger. Incidents like this make me wonder if growing up is all that it's cracked up to be. The old-

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er a man gets, the less hair he has and the more things keep getting into it.

"Davey giving you trouble?" Grandfather asked.

"Before he was in the place three minutes he'd started organizing a prisoners' union. He's already got a hunger strike going to protest the food, and this afternoon he hit me with two pages of supplementary demands. Among other things, he wants a TV set in every cell." The Sheriff blew a blast into his handkerchief. "Now he's trying to organize my deputies," he said, sounding as if he couldn't quite believe it.

"TV in every patrol car?" Grandfather asked.

"Johnny," the Sheriff said, "did you see this fellow on Elmer Vaughan's property?"

I shook my head, suddenly understanding why he was being so polite to us. I was about to be a witness, and he was sounding me out to see whose side I was on.

"Or climbing the fence?"

I shook my head again. "The road takes a little rise there, and I didn't see him at all until he came over the top on his way back to his car."

"But he was running?"

"Like a scared rabbit."

"That's what Joe said. Davey hasn't acted very scared since then. He's making noises about suing me for false arrest, and I'd feel better with a better case."

"Do you have a case?" Grandfather asked politely.

"I think so. Davey went around trying to get someone to do something about that machine of Elmer's and threatening dire consequences, and then two witnesses saw him running from the direction of the gravel pit just after the explosion took place. It's a case, but I'd be happier about it if someone'd seen him on Elmer's property."

"Is the machine repairable?" Grandfather asked.

"All I saw of it was small pieces scattered over about ten acres. I'd say no, but I'll get an expert opinion as soon as Elmer recovers enough to answer questions."

"Where'd Davey get the dynamite?"

"I figure it was Elmer's. He usually kept some in his work shack, which wasn't locked."

"Doesn't Elmer know if there was dynamite in the shack?"

"Elmer's a mess. All he does is blubber that he's ruined and nobody cares. According to what little sense I can make of what he says, he doesn't know anything about anything except that he heard the boom and nearly got clobbered by pieces of his beautiful machine."

"It's a queer case," Grandfather said.

"It sure is. Imagine—that labor organizer blowing up a machine

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to save ten men's jobs when Elmer hasn't had even one employee since about 1935."

"That's a lucky thing for you."

"Why?"

"Because that's why Davey won't sue you for false arrest. I'd like to talk with him."

"You're welcome to try. Anyone who talks with him mostly ends up listening."

To stop the organizing activities the Sheriff had moved Davey to the most remote cell in the jail, but we could hear his big booming voice and squeak punctuations as soon as we stepped into the place. "That's right," he was saying. "Television cameras. They spot them along the corridor, maybe even put one in every cell. One man can run a jail ten times this size. He can watch the whole place, and if anything happens he takes care of it by pushing buttons. When they install that kind of setup here, *you'll* be out of a job. You guys better organize right now."

He was talking with Steve Reichel, one of Sheriff Pilkins' deputies.

"Steve!" the Sheriff bellowed.

Steve tiptoed away quietly. The Sheriff said, "Ring the bell when you've finished," and followed him.

"Oh, it's you," Davey said. His clothes were wrinkled, his bow tie was crooked, and he needed a shave, but he acted just as cocky as he had on our front porch.

"I hear you've been giving the Sheriff a lively time," Grandfather said.

Davey grinned. "Do you know how many people are in prison in the United States? Over two hundred thousand. I got one of the deputies to call the library and ask. This could be the largest completely unorganized group in our population. It's time someone did something about that. Two hundred thousand!"

"I doubt that very many of them are much concerned about the threat of automation," Grandfather said.

"Automation is the curse of Twentieth Century civilization," Davey snapped. "Directly or indirectly, it affects everyone."

"It affects most people for the better," Grandfather said. "Even if it didn't, blowing up machines wouldn't be the way to solve the problem."

"Bah. I never went near the old man's precious machine. The only time I ever set foot on his property was yesterday morning when I called at that pigpen where he lives, and he laughed me off the place."

"Then why did you run?"

"I figured it might be a trap, and I figured right. Business interests will go to any length to give the labor movement a black eye."

"You weren't on Elmer's property when it happened?"

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"Nope. Parked my car and walked along the road trying to find a place where I could see that dratted machine. I didn't, and I was walking back to my car when it blew up."

"Where'd you get that newspaper clipping?"

"One of our members spotted it and turned it in."

"What paper did it come from?"

Davey scratched his head. "I don't know. Does it matter?"

"It matters."

"As soon as I get back to headquarters I'll try and find out for you."

"Thanks," Grandfather said.

We walked to the other end of the corridor and rang the bell. Sheriff Pilkins was still bellowing at Steve Reichel in his private office, and another deputy let us out.

We stepped out into the rain. Grandfather opened his umbrella and said disgustedly, "We should have stopped at Elmer's on the way here. By the time we get there it'll be dark."

"I have a flashlight in the glove compartment," I said.

"What good is a flashlight on a night like this?"

We splashed across the parking lot, and Grandfather slammed my jalopy's door so hard I was tempted to get out and put splints on it. "All right," he said a moment later. "Let's stop at Elmer's."

The wind came up and it started to rain harder, and by the time we got there it was so dark I had trouble finding Elmer's driveway. There was a feeble crack of light showing at one of the windows, but Grandfather banged on the door three times without getting any response. He opened it.

Jim Davey was wrong. No pig with a smidgen of character would have stayed in that house for a minute. There was junk everywhere—cracked dishes, old worn-out furniture, dust, dirt, garbage, and in the middle of it all old Elmer sat at a table by a kerosene lamp with his face in his hands.

Grandfather said, "Elmer!"

Elmer jumped up, grabbing a shotgun, and there was nothing junky about *that*. It looked shiny and ready for action.

Grandfather said sternly, "Don't point that gun at me!"

Elmer lowered the gun.

"That's better. Now tell me about your loading machine."

Elmer sat down again. He buried his face in his hands and started to sob, and between sobs he sputtered, "Get out. Get out. Get out."

Grandfather tried twice more, but all Elmer would do was sob and sputter, so we got out.

We drove down the road to the entrance of the gravel pit. Grandfather took my flashlight, and we climbed over the gate, using Elmer's *NO TRESPASSING* sign for a foothold. Grandfather led the way up the lane and along the

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sloppy ruts that pointed down into the pit, and I kept looking over my shoulder expecting Elmer to come charging out of the night with his shotgun.

"I hope the Sheriff looked the place over good," I said. "If there were any clues, they've washed away by now."

What would Pilkins do with a clue even if he found it?" Grandfather asked.

Eventually Grandfather located the place where the explosion took place, and we circled out from there, trying to spot pieces of the loading machine. When the Sheriff said it was spread over ten acres he wasn't exaggerating. All the flashlight picked out were some gear wheels, a few hunks of metal, and a couple of gadgets I didn't recognize.

"Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall," I said.

Grandfather grunted.

"Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. And all the Sheriff's horses and all the Sheriff's unorganized deputies—"

"We might as well go home," Grandfather said.

"Not enough light? I could go get another flashlight. Or borrow Elmer's lamp."

"No. Let's go home. I can't do anything more tonight."

As I drove up Main Street on my way home from school the next day, I saw Jim Davey's car parked at the curb in front of Jake Palmer's Barber Shop. I swung in beside it and got out. Grandfather and Davey were sitting there on the bench. Davey's clothes and whiskers needed attention worse than they had the night before, but Davey looked cocky as ever.

"I'll send you some literature," he was saying. "I'd like to straighten you out on this thing."

Grandfather chuckled. "You're welcome to send it, but you'd be wasting both the literature and the postage. I'm too old to be doing any automating, but I'm perfectly willing to accept the benefits from those who do."

"Benefits!" Davey shouted. "Try talking benefits to the guys that get fired!"

Grandfather handed some coins to me and jerked his thumb at the barbershop door. Jake Palmer has put in one of these machines that sells pop in cans, and I went in and bought us a round of drinks.

"Here's a perfect example," Grandfather said, as I passed out the cans. "An automatic vending machine. It increases the sales of pop by making the product available everywhere, and that means more jobs. It helps small merchants by giving them a new source of income that they wouldn't have time to earn if they had to handle the sales themselves. It creates a whole new industry in the manufacture, sale, servicing, and oper-

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ating of vending machines. Progress has always made more jobs and income than it destroys, and it always will."

Davey snorted. Then he looked at the can of pop I'd handed to him and let out a screach that would have curdled it if it'd been milk instead of root beer. "Look at that!" he yelled, pointing a trembling finger. "A zip-top can! Self-opening cans, self-opening bottles—and you say progress means more jobs! What about the poor guys that were making can openers and bottle openers?"

Grandfather pulled the tab on his can, inspected his fingers for wounds, tilted the can to take a couple of swallows of ginger ale, then inspected his fingers again. "They're manufacturing Band-Aids," he said, "for the people who open the zip-top cans."

When Davey stopped laughing he drank his pop, shook hands with Grandfather, promised again to send him that literature, and drove away.

"What's he doing here?" I asked.

"I told Pilkins that if he'd bring him to Borgville and turn him loose here, I'd convince him that he should forget that false arrest suit."

"Did you?"

"Easily. If word got around that Davey had come all the way to Borgville to organize ten non-existent workers, he'd be a laughing stock."

"What about Elmer's loader?"

"The case is closed."

"You mean—Sheriff Pilkins caught the dynamiter?"

"Not really. He agreed to close the case when I told him who it was. The dynamite part was simple. It was the newspaper clipping that was complicated. It took me almost two days to track that down."

"So where did it come from?"

"It's like this," Grandfather said. "Elmer's lost most of his gravel business. This year, after maybe twenty-five years, he's going to lose the county road business. Trucks waste too much time waiting to be loaded, and the drivers have to pitch in and help. The business doesn't amount to much, but it was all Elmer had. He mortgaged half of his farmland to pay his wife's medical bills, and he's had to mortgage the rest, piece by piece, to meet his mortgage payments.

"Well, Maggie Cross heard about his losing the county business, and she tried to help her uncle out by making up a story about him getting an automatic loader. She sent it to the Wiston *Journal,* hoping that the County Road Commission would see it and maybe reconsider. The *Journal* people spotted the oddity about an old gravel pit getting automated, so they put it on the wire service and a few papers around the country picked it up; but being as it was from Borg-

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ville, the *Journal* didn't use it. So Maggie's lie didn't help a bit, which is usually the case with lies, and she didn't want to admit what she'd done because she was afraid she'd be getting into trouble over nothing."

"Then there wasn't any loader." Grandfather nodded.

"But I saw it—saw the pieces!"

"You'd been told that Elmer had a new loader, so you saw a loader."

"Look," I said. "*Somebody* blew up *something*. I saw *that*."

"Well, all that fuss about a loading machine he didn't have put Elmer on a spot. He was ruined, and he thought people were making fun of him. When he saw the union man snooping around a second time, he put all the dynamite he had under his junk pile and blew it up. Wanted to scare the guy away, he said, and he certainly did that. He was pretty badly worked up about it, but he'll be all right now. His sons didn't know he was having such a tough time. They'll help him out."

"Junk pile?" I said.

"Right. You see, Elmer never threw anything away, and—"

"Of course," I said disgustedly. "Anyone who's seen the junk in his living room should know he'd have a mountainous junk pile at his gravel pit. But look here. Elmer probably had enough parts there to *build* a loading machine, if he'd known how. The Sheriff looked the place over in broad daylight, and he thought it was a loading machine. You made one swing around there in the dark, in a driving rain, with only my little flashlight—"

"Oh, that," Grandfather said, looking modest. "The junk pile was spread awfully thin by the time the Sheriff got there, and like you, he'd heard there was a loader, so he found pieces of a loader. I was just trying to find out what had really been blown up. And I don't need much light to recognize parts of Elmer's old Model T Ford."

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Something different: the melodramatic tale of an old woman who had only one mad wish in her mind—and the means and will to fulfill that wish against all odds ... (What is the fascination of new stories about painters and paintings? Is it because we realize how extraordinarily valuable fine paintings have become? When modern paintings achieve fantastic prices at public auction, does it somehow add importance and meaning to stories about such paintings? It must be the difference in appeal between petty larceny and a million-dollar crime—or, in these days of inflation, has a million-dollar crime already become reduced to petty larceny?)

VENGEANCE VILLA

by DONALD OLSON

IT WON'T BE DARK FOR A COUPLE of hours yet; the sun is still blazing out there on the Gulf, and I don't want to do it while there's a chance that someone on the beach or in a boat might see me and try to stop me. The Administrator thinks I'm packing this afternoon. I could tell from his manner he was eager to get me out of here; after all, what am I to them but one of the less valuable antiques that have to be cleared out before they can get to work turning the place into another Tourist Attraction of the Sunshine State?

In more than one way I'll be doing them a favor, for my death should contribute one more bizarre element to the legend already surrounding the villa and which will soon have the tourists queuing up at the gates, eager to fork over a couple of bucks to satisfy their morbid curiosity. How the old lady used to rant and rave at the thought of it!

Ever since Mrs. Irvyne died they've been asking me where I planned to go and I've always replied that I had no idea, although I've known ever since I got the bad news about the bequest. After all, where could I go? The villa has been my home for thirty-five years and when I leave it I shall simply walk down those magnolia-bordered steps to the beach and keep walking toward Mexico, and

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that will be the end of it—until I'm no more than another bit of flotsam washed up on the shore with the shells and dead fish and slimy seaweed.

There's no other way, really, not any more. If I'd had the guts and good sense to walk out of here twenty years ago it might have been different; Lord knows, I was often tempted, but whenever I felt I couldn't bear working for the old lady one minute longer I'd always remember that handsome bequest she'd promised me in her will and consider the unlikelihood of her lasting much longer, at her advanced age and with her physical infirmities. Meanwhile, I was living in this fifty-room Moorish stucco palace on the Gulf of Mexico with nothing more troublesome to contend with than the capricious temper of a querulous old lady.

Well, the joke was on me, all right. There wasn't enough left in the estate to pay me even a month's wages.

As long as I'm writing it all down I had best uphold my reputation of being a systematic person by presenting the facts in proper chronological order, even though most of you already know the historical background against which the recent events were played out—at least, the part of it concerning the Hilary Irvyne Memorial Museum of Art. If I lift my head I can see a corner of it from here—an architectural gem in the style of the Florentine Renaissance, as appropriately situated here among the palms of the Gulf Coast as it ever was in its native Tuscany, from where it was transported, bit by bit, to satisfy the whim of a rich, guilt-haunted American widow. It was erected as a memorial to her son Hilary, an unsuccessful painter, and as a tomb for her husband, whose burial in an elaborate crypt at the end of the museum's Garden Court had been an act of poetic revenge; for Mrs. Irvyne's multimillionaire husband—they called him the Citrus Czar—had been a man shamelessly and fiercely hostile to the arts.

In the early Twenties the Irvynes had built a magnificent Moorish villa on the Gulf and lived there with their only child, a son, Hilary, who from childhood had had only one desire—to be a painter. Henry Irvyne had done everything in his power—and his power was considerable—to drive this notion out of his son's head. Henry was determined that his son should carry on the family enterprises, while Hilary just as stubbornly continued to nurture his artistic ambitions.

Mrs. Irvyne, completely dominated by her husband, had pleaded with Hilary to give in to his father and to abandon his ideas of becoming a painter. For a while the boy did try to serve both Art and Industry, but he had neither talent nor temperament for busi-

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ness, and at last he simply ran away to Paris. It was the thing to do then, you'll remember—the Lost Generation.

The Irvynes tried every possible means to get him back. They badgered, bribed, and besought, all to no avail. Then, in true Hemingway fashion, Hilary went to Spain during the Civil War and was lost in action.

Henry Irvyne died two years later, and that was when the real Elizabeth Irvyne was born. The loss of her son preyed on her conscience. She felt she was personally responsible. On land about a half mile from the villa she built the museum—the Hilary Irvyne Memorial Museum of Art. Its largest gallery was hung with all the pictures Hilary had painted while living at home, and the rest of the building was devoted to a random assortment of hastily acquired, creditable, but mostly second-rate Old Masters. Hilary's pictures reminded me very much of my own pallid, painstakingly realistic landscapes and seascapes, though Hilary's showed, I must admit, far more imagination than mine.

This grand and costly gesture did not, however, totally ease Mrs. Irvyne's conscience. She next took it into her head to create for Hilary a posthumous reputation as a great artist. This notion exceeded the ludicrous and surpassed the absurd, but then Mrs. Irvyne had, despite the large fortune expended on the museum, more than sufficient means to promote an idea even as ridiculous as that. Her money bought an enormous amount of publicity, but also earned her the immense scorn and contempt of all the serious art critics and museum curators. In time she became an international joke in the art world, yet no amount of ridicule could cure her of her manifestly foolish obsession.

Mrs. Irvyne had no more genuine appreciation of art than did her husband; it concerned her only to the extent that it was related to her dead son. She had no patience whatever with the newer schools of painting and nothing more modern than the neoclassic was represented in her museum. The Impressionists were "tawdry," and she considered Abstract Expressionism an "abomination." At first she displayed some interest in the Art School here in Gulfport, and even offered financial assistance to promising students; but this ceased when it became apparent that the school had no intention of being governed by Mrs. Irvyne's prejudices.

I had the uncertain honor of being the last student to attract her attention, although it was not because I was by any means "promising." I had a gift for making pretty, vapid water colors of beaches and sunsets, but neither the passion, temperament, nor imagination to paint seriously. The only

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reason I was there was because my mother's estate had provided enough to permit me to do as I pleased for a couple of years, and it had pleased me to play at studying art in this charming colony at Gulfport.

Mrs. Irvyne was kind to me, inviting me to tea at the villa, letting me spend hours sketching in the gardens, while she sat nearby muttering invectives against the imbeciles who controlled the art world and extolling the unappreciated genius of Hilary Irvyne. She had scarcely any other visitors since her monomania had discouraged everyone from calling on her. Most of her time was spent on mountains of correspondence with curators and critics all over the country. I had been casting about for some sort of work to do now that my money was running out and Mrs. Irvyne engaged me as her secretary, a position that eventually expanded to include that of chauffeur, butler, and general factotum as her own dwindling means forced her to introduce drastic economies.

Having squandered her health and nearly all of her fortune on futile schemes to gain recognition for her son, Mrs. Irvyne finally reached the point where she did not have the wherewithal to maintain either the museum or the villa. It was then that the State stepped in and agreed to assume maintenance of both establishments under an agreement that would permit Mrs. Irvyne to occupy the villa for the remainder of her life. The only right she retained to the museum was a key allowing her access to the crypt of her husband, where she too would eventually be interred, and a key to Hilary's gallery. Her mind by then was in such a muddle that she did not fully comprehend the fact that she had surrendered all but this one privilege, and she was constantly at loggerheads with the Administrator over the new policies at the museum. She refused to understand that she could no longer discriminate against the sort of pictures the new directors began to acquire.

Then last year the museum achieved the coup of the decade. It won out over every important museum in the country for the Lazaretti Retrospective. Lazaretti was indeed a very big fish to catch in such an obscure little net. More than one critic speculated in print on how the museum had carried it off. Lazaretti, after all, was one of the giants of Abstract Expressionism, almost as important in his own right as Picasso. Now in his fifties, he had become so crippled with arthritis in his hands that he could no longer paint.

The Lazaretti Retrospective was to be the first American exhibition of the master's greatest works, and to top it off the artist himself was

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coming to America to be present at the gala opening. The only person who was not elated at the prospect of the great event was Mrs. Irvyne, and her displeasure turned to fury when she learned that the Lazarettis were going to be hung in Hilary's gallery.

I shall always remember the way she looked when I answered her summons to the drawing room the afternoon before the opening of the Lazaretti Exhibition. She stood there in a black dress too long for fashion and too short for ceremony. Her face was the color of paste, scored with wrinkles and settled into a fixed expression of truculent bitterness.

"Well, Edmund," she greeted me with a malignant scowl, "is it true?"

I had just returned from the museum. "Yes, I'm afraid it is."

Her frail body stiffened. "They have actually had the audacity to *remove* Hilary's pictures? To make room for that *rubbish?*"

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Irvyne."

"You're sorry! My dear Edmund, *they* shall be even sorrier, mark my words!" She began to hobble back and forth on the parquet floor, striking it repeatedly with her cane. "And what, pray tell me, did they do with Hilary's pictures?"

"Stored them away—now please don't upset yourself—in the cellar."

She looked at me as if I had told the most atrocious lie. "No! I don't believe it! In the *cellar?* Hilary Irvyne's paintings in the *cellar* of the Hilary Irvyne Memorial Museum of Art?"

Her expression could not have been more scandalized if I had said they had been burned. I was truly alarmed at her appearance. She had had one heart attack already and it would not have surprised me if she had another on the spot.

"Edmund, Edmund, this is too much. This I will not abide. Hilary's pictures consigned to the darkness of a cellar! And for what? To make room for the abomination! Why, he might never have existed for all they care."

"You've done all you could, Mrs. Irvyne."

"If that were true, Hilary wouldn't be unknown."

"But it isn't up to you," I said, more boldly than I was accustomed to speaking. "It never has been, really."

She flashed those fiery black eyes at me. "You're naive, Edmund, you always were. So was I, once. I thought recognition was inevitable. Hilary was so—so passionate. So dedicated! And then I began to think that all the world needed was a gentle reminder, a bit of coaxing. I whispered. No one heard. I talked. No one listened. I began to *shout.* Oh, yes, indeed, I lobbied for Hilary. You know it. They all know it. I know what they think, the fools. When you

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crusade for a great unrecognized talent you learn all about the cabal, the Establishment. It isn't lofty—oh, no, merely snooty!"

"Time has a way of righting all injustices, Mrs. Irvyne," I meekly suggested; but she only pounded the floor with her cane.

"*I* haven't the time, Edmund. My time is running out. But this I will not allow! Never!"

"It would be useless to protest, I'm afraid."

"You don't have to tell me that. Words are a waste of breath. Action, Edmund! The time has come for action."

"Action, Mrs. Iryne?" I couldn't imagine what was going through her mind but there was a disquieting malevolence glimmering in those crafty, hooded eyes.

"It's their own fault, Edmund. They've brought it on themselves. They've driven me to it."

"What do you propose to do?"

"*We*, Edmund. I haven't the strength to do it alone."

I didn't like the sound of this. She signaled me to come closer and when I stood beside her she fastened a clawlike hand on my arm and said fiercely, "The abomination must be destroyed."

I looked at her dumbly as she raised her cane toward that gloomy Constable landscape beside which we stood and pretended to slash the canvas. Her head snapped toward me. "Do you understand now, Edmund? Destroy them! Each and every one. Tear them to shreds!"

"The Lazarettis?" I was sure the old hag had finally gone stark raving mad.

"The abominations! Yes, yes!"

"My dear Mrs. Irvyne, you can't be serious."

"Don't bet on it. How many did you say there are?"

"About fifty."

"A good night's work for us." Her eyes gleamed wickedly with anticipation. It was so utterly preposterous that I wanted to laugh out loud. If I had I think she would probably have attacked me with her cane.

"Of course you've every right to be upset," I said soothingly, "but you mustn't even think of anything so—so rash. It would be a crime. They could—"

"A crime! Hanging such rubbish in Hilary's gallery, burying Hilary's lifework in a *cellar*, what is that if not a crime? A crime and a scandal!"

"Nevertheless, they have the right."

"They have no *moral* right. *I* built the Hilary Irvyne Memorial Museum and I will die before I see his memory so viciously desecrated."

I had listened to this dreary saga for thirty-five years and I was heartily sick of it. "Even if you wanted to do such a thing, why, it would be impossible. The museum is well guarded, and they've added extra precautions for the

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special Lazaretti Exhibition."

She ignored this quibble. "Don't be a ninny, Edmund. You know I have keys to the crypt and to Hilary's gallery."

"In which case they'd know immediately whom to blame."

"They couldn't prove a thing."

It was pointless to avoid the main issue. "You couldn't possibly do all that"—I nearly said vandalism—"yourself."

"Of course not. I said I'd need your help, didn't I?"

"Oh, no, Mrs. Irvyne. I really couldn't."

"You shall!"

"I'm sorry—but no."

Her snapping eyes challenged me. "You refuse?"

"I must. If you would only stop and consider—"

"You absolutely *refuse* to help me destroy the abominations?"

I nodded, expecting her to fly into a violent rage. To my surprise she merely hobbled to the nearest chair and arduously settled herself into it, tucking her cane into the cushion's edge and folding her hands demurely in her lap. She looked exceedingly fragile, a bundle of brown sticks, dwarfed in the faded splendor of that vast room.

"Dear Edmund," she began, her eyes looking up at me now with beseeching softness. "Each time I sit down like this I wonder how I shall ever find the strength to get up again. I'm finished, Edmund, finished." I started to protest, but she cut me off. "It doesn't matter. I don't care what happens to me. But you, Edmund, what on earth shall you do?"

"Do?"

She continued to regard me with a gravely benevolent smile. "I mean, when you leave here?"

Ah, then I began to perceive what it was all about and my stomach was gripped by a vague, sick chill. "What do you mean?"

The smile seemed to ooze out of her wrinkled face, leaving it pinched and ugly-mean. "I mean that I shall dismiss you, of course—immediately—if you persist in this treachery. Furthermore, the very generous provision which you know I have made for you in my will shall be struck out of that document."

I could feel the muscles quivering in my jaw. "You'd really do that? After thirty-five years of service to you? You'd sacrifice me to your—your—"

"*You*. Oh, my dear Edmund, I have sacrificed a huge fortune for Hilary. I've sacrificed *myself* for Hilary."

"But what good will it do?" I cried.

"Vengeance! If Hilary shall not have recognition he shall at least have vengeance."

"I don't believe you. I don't believe you would do that to me."

"Hmpf!" She reached out for the phone on the table beside her

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and once again I realized how shrewdly she had set the scene. She knew me so well, knew exactly how I would react; that's why she had chosen that particular chair, so very convenient to the phone. She jabbed the dial with a bony forefinger, then paused.

"I shall now dial George Humphries. I shall direct him to come out here within the hour and when he gets here I shall instruct him to delete the bequest to Edmund Lowry from my last will and testament. You may as well start packing now so you can drive away with George when he leaves. I swear by my love for Hilary Irvyne that I shall do this—*unless* you speak up before this number is completed and agree to help me to do what must be done. If you do not speak up by the time this call is put through you may consider yourself no longer in my employ."

She slowly began dialing. I could have killed her as she sat there. Oh, how easily, how cheerfully I could have wrapped my fingers around that skinny neck and throttled the little remaining life out of her body. Truthfully, I had hated her for years—despised her not for what she was, a demented old fool, but for what I had become in her service, for all my years of spineless acquiescence.

Yet even this thought was tempered by reason. I knew that she wouldn't have cared if I did strangle her to death; she was so close to the brink of the abyss already she might have welcomed a little push. And what would I gain? God knows, I'm not an adventurer, nor had I the slightest conviction that I could so much as swipe a magazine from a newsstand, to say nothing of committing a murder, and get away with it.

No, there was really no choice. So of course I did what she knew I would do—agreed to help her, rationalizing as I did so that once she had had a few hours to reflect on the outrageousness of her plan she would come to her senses and forget about it.

I should have known her better than that. That night, after dark, I was dutifully pushing the old lady along the promenade in her wheel chair toward the museum and an act of violence which the night iself seemed to render improbable. Moon and stars glowed in a cloudless sky, the surf grated reassuringly on the beach below us, and a mild Gulf breeze rattled the palm fronds and bathed our faces in the mingled perfumes of frangipani and gardenia.

It should be explained for anyone who has never seen the place that a sea wall extends along the beach in front of the villa all the way to the musuem. Behind this wall the grounds have been laid out into a sort of park with royal palm trees and a variety of flow-

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ering tropical shrubs. A narrow promenade borders the top of the sea wall, ending less than fifty feet from the entrance to the museum grounds, through which a flagstone path leads to a small doorway in the back wall of the museum. This was the crypt door to which Mrs. Irvyne had a key.

An air of unreality infected me with an unnatural calm, but as we drew close to the end of the promenade and saw the white marble walls of the museum gleaming in the moonlight I could feel my heart stir and seem to wrench itself awake.

"We'll just wait a moment," said Mrs. Irvyne quietly as we reached the end of the promenade. She sat stiffly in her chair, the breeze ruffling her white hair, for all the world like a sweet little old lady taking the night air; but concealed in that pink chiffon scarf held so demurely in her lap was a wicked-looking antique dagger with a curved blade and jeweled hilt, once the property of a maharajah.

I stood behind her, my hands resting on the handlebars of the chair. Though no more than a stone's throw from the museum, I still could not believe it would happen, and what made it even more bizarre was the fact that she really had no conception of what she was doing. Her obsession about Hilary blinded her to everything. She didn't care a fig for Lazaretti. What was Lazaretti to her but a fraud and a mountebank, one of the many charlatans who had robbed Hilary of the glory that should have been his? She was ignorant of the immense prestige Lazaretti enjoyed; nor did she appreciate the fact that she meant to destroy the greatest works of a modern master, the works on which his fame and reputation were founded, the works which had so profoundly influenced contemporary painting.

"Help me up, Edmund," she said at last. It was necessary actually to lift her out of the chair. "Here, you carry this," she said, handing me the dagger still wrapped in the scarf. "Now shove the chair into the shrubbery. You never know who might happen along."

This done, she leaned on my arm and we slowly proceeded on the flagstone path to that small steel door in the museum's back wall. I was expecting we would be challenged at any moment. Surely the guards made periodic patrols through the grounds. We could explain our presence convincingly enough as long as we were in the grounds or entering the crypt; only if we were to get into Hilary's gallery would our presence seem suspicious.

Mrs. Irvyne handed me a key. We slipped inside and shut the door behind us. We were in total darkness. I drew out my flashlight and switched it on. We were sur-

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rounded by urns and pots and other paraphernalia used in the maintenance of the crypt, access to which was through a small arched opening in front of us.

Stealthily we passed into the crypt itself, where to our right a massive carved alabaster screen shielded us from sight of the two sarcophagi. Now we were only a few yards from Hilary's gallery and the Lazarettis. A cold sweat broke out on my upper lip and forehead, and my shirt clung wetly to my shoulder blades.

I looked through an oval window across the floodlit Garden Court to the lighted foyer. "Do you see anyone?" Mrs. Irvyne whispered.

"No."

"Then let's get on with it."

Her voice trembled and when her hand clutched my arm I felt the quivering in her ancient fingers. Silently we began to climb the narrow stone staircase rising from the crypt to a small door in Hilary's gallery. The old lady was breathing heavily now and had I not been holding her tightly I'm sure she would never have made it. At the top of the stairs she handed me the other key. The door swung open into what at first appeared to be total blackness.

"Flashlight," she croaked hoarsely, and as the beam shot upward, "At the floor! The floor, you fool!"

The gallery was lighted from clerestory windows in the roof and now that our eyes were adapting to the darkness we could pick out the stars glimmering through squares of glass high above us; a murky, silvery gloom revealed the walls of the gallery and the darker squares hung upon them. Incredibly, we were there, undetected, unchallenged, in the very midst of what the bedeviled old woman called the Abomination.

Mrs. Irvyne seized my arm and dragged me toward the nearest picture. I saw in the flashlight's beam a delicately structural composition in a weirdly striking variety of blues and greens shot through with spidery lines of gold; artfully simple, it hinted creepily of something exposed under surgery, something gross and raw that should have been veiled from sight by a membrane of tissue. It was Lazaretti's famous *Mindscape Two*.

"Disgusting!" burst out of Mrs. Irvyne. "Hilary in the *cellar* to make room for this! The knife, the knife!"

The awful moment had come. The impossible reality. I stood there, frozen. She gave my arm a yank, whispering again, fiercely, "Knife, knife!"

With crazed impatience she grabbed the dagger from my hand. "On the picture! Shine it on the picture!"

I swung the beam upward. She advanced to within inches of the frame, making a curiously snake-

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like rasping in her throat. She raised the dagger. I couldn't breathe. There were slight popping, scratchy noises as she first stabbed the picture in its center and then with swift angry motions ripped long diagonal gashes in the canvas, the blade striking the frame with hollow blunt sounds.

I watched, petrified, as she continued to slash across the painted surface. "Ahhh!" she kept muttering in that grating whisper. When she finally drew back, almost stumbling into my arms, the tattered ruin hung in shreds from the frame.

She moved inexorably to the next picture and repeated the slashing. "For you, Hilary, for you!" she kept intoning as she ripped and tore through the canvas. All this exertion soon took its toll of her strength and by the time she had destroyed the third picture she could barely lift the dagger. It was then she turned to me.

"Destroy them, Edmund! Destroy these abominations. For Hilary!"

It was only a nightmare, after all. This obscene performance was divorced from reality. Nothing but madness, and I was a part of it. I gripped the dagger and like someone in a dream I moved toward the paintings, while she stood beside me jabbing her gnarled fist into my ribs, goading me on. Again I was seized with the urge to turn the dagger's point on her, to plunge it into her mad body. And now it would be possible, for this was not the real world, this was a dream in which the impossible was more easily accomplished than the possible. One quick downward thrust of the blade and she would be dead and they would find her here and needn't ever know I had been involved. I could place the dagger in her withered hand so that it would look like suicide, the insane act of a madwoman.

But again reason prevailed. Suppose I were discovered before I could get away from the museum or out of the grounds? It would be just my luck to have it happen. And all the while she was urging me on, jabbing and hissing at me.

"Destroy them, Edmund, destroy them!"

As if in response to the power of her will my arm rose high in the air, paused, then plunged toward the canvas. I shut my eyes. Beside me Mrs. Irvyne gave a little cry of triumph. One painting in shreds, another, another, another. I've no idea how long it took to circle the gallery, no idea how many pictures we left in tatters behind us. Occasionally she would seize the dagger from me and with renewed strength desecrate a canvas.

In the end I had almost to carry her down those stairs and through the eerie crypt behind whose ala-

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aster screen I could imagine a sly pproving malignant smile on the emains of her husband's face. She erself was like a corpse that had o be dragged through that mock- ıgly moonlit park to where we ad concealed the wheel chair. Dumping her into it like a sack f bones, I wheeled her as rapidly s my legs would allow down the ength of the promenade to the illa, silent and dark among the rooding palms.

What thoughts I had of the avoc behind us were driven from ıy mind when I got a good look t the old lady's face after I had arried her up the stairs and put er on her bed. It was a shocking ght. She looked like a skeleton. felt that I could see her very ones through the shrunken trans- arent flesh. Her face was now the olor of ashes and her lips were lue. Her breath came out in shal- ow, labored gasps. Her eyes flick- red open and they seemed, per- aps because of their strange opa- ity, to have sunk deep into her kull. She struggled to speak, her vithered lips trying vainly to shape ıe words. My God, I thought, he's dying! She's had another at- ıck.

It did not occur to me to let er die, possibly because I was still o dreadfully shaken by what we ad done and could not bear the hought of being left alone with ıe knowledge and responsibility f the deed. It was as if she had planned even this part of the scheme, willing herself to die and leave me to reap the consequences of our crime. No, I wouldn't let her die!

I rushed downstairs and called Dr. Altmann. When he arrived I met him at the door and led him upstairs and stood in the back- ground as he opened his bag, pre- pared a hypodermic, and adminis- tered something into Mrs. Irvyne's wasted arm.

"Is she—alive?" I whispered as he drew back.

"Barely. I've been expecting something like this. What brought it on, do you know?"

Did I *know!*

"She's been—overwrought. All day she's been carrying on about the museum."

He gave me what I thought was a strange look and then appeared to change his mind about some- thing he'd been about to say. "You had better call the Administrator."

I felt my heart lurch. "The Ad- ministrator? Tonight?"

"Right now." Again he gave me that oddly questioning look. "They've told you nothing?"

"About what?" My God, I thought, do they already know?

"Never mind. The Administra- tor will explain." Then, more to himself than to me, "The irony . . ."

In a daze I called the Adminis- trator, Mr. Farnsworth, and it seemed less than a quarter of an hour before I admitted him at the

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front door. He was not alone. There was another man with him, a tall bearded figure with piercing dark eyes whom I had never seen before.

"Is she—how is she, Edmund?" whispered Farnsworth. His face was very pale.

"Still alive. The doctor's with her."

They were following me across the hall when Dr. Altmann came down the stairs. He gripped Farnsworth's hand, but his eyes were on the man behind him. "I've given her something," he said. "Don't be alarmed."

"Ghastly thing to have happen now," murmured Farnsworth. "Only hours away from—" He didn't finish the sentence, but suddenly put his arm on mine and gently directed my attention to the bearded man. "Brace yourself for a shock, Edmund. This is Bruno Lazaretti."

Lazaretti!

My hand, which had been automatically reaching for his, froze in the air. It *was* a nightmare. Lazaretti here?

In spite of the gravity of the occasion Farnsworth seemed unable to prevent a smile from creeping over his face. "That is not what I expected to shock you, Edmund. Don't you recognize him?"

"I—no . . ."

The bearded man was also smiling and as I watched him I was struck by the feeling that, yes, he did look somehow familiar. Something about the eyes—

Farnsworth again took my arm. "I thought you might notice a resemblance. You see, Edmund, Lazaretti is merely this gentleman's *nom de guerre*. His real name—have you guessed?—is Hilary Irvyne."

A mist passed across my eyes I was conscious of the doctor gripping my other arm. I think I must have come very close to passing out. In my brain, burning through the mist, I saw the man's eyes. Mrs. Irvyne's eyes!

The next thing I knew I was sitting on a chair in the hall and Farnsworth was handing me a glass of water. They were speaking, the bearded man and Farnsworth alternately, explaining calmly the incredible, inconceivable facts. Hilary Irvyne had not died in Spain, but had seized the opportunity to escape once and for all from the importunities of his parents to drag him back to a life that he hated. He had gone to Rome, assumed a new identity, become the painter he had always wanted to be, repudiated his family, vowed they should never know that he was alive. With the affliction that ended his creative life had come gradually a softening of his obstinacy, a desire to reconcile with his mother while she was still alive. It was he who had arranged that the Lazaretti Exhibition be held at the Irvyne Memorial Museum. His

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secret had been revealed to fewer han a half dozen persons, and it was he who insisted that not until he opening day of the show was is mother to be informed of the truth.

I sat there, stricken dumb, scarcely able to comprehend the full meaning of this disclosure. To hink that even as they stood there debating the wisdom of breaking he news to Mrs. Irvyne, Hilary's gallery was hung with nothing but he wreckage of his life's work. No, it was too much for the reeling mind to grasp, and all I could think of was my own part in the catastrophe. If only I had had the moral fiber to refuse that diabolical command. A wave of hatred poured over me toward that fiendishly vindictive old woman. I should have killed her!

"To be truthful," I heard the doctor saying, "I don't believe it could have any further debilitating effect. If anything, it might possibly give her the will to live. Right now she wants to die. Lord knows, if she does pull through, how soon it will be safe for her to know that you, sir, are Bruno Lazaretti. But that needn't concern us now. But to know that her son is alive and with her—yes, that might do the trick."

Hilary seemed doubtful. "Still . . . the shock . . ."

I heard my own voice break into their discussion. "If you would let me prepare her, Dr. Altmann. She's closer to me than to anyone. It would be less disturbing to her."

They all looked at me. "Very good of you, old fellow," said Altmann. "But are you sure you're not too shaken up yourself?"

I felt a smile forming on my lips as I stood up. "No, no. I'm quite myself now."

And so it was I found myself entering Mrs. Irvyne's room alone, the others waiting outside. She seemed to be breathing more naturally and her complexion was not so deathly pale. She opened her eyes as I leaned over the bed and spoke her name softly.

"Edmund? Is it you?"

"Yes, Mrs. Irvyne. Are you feeling better?"

She nodded faintly and made a slight movement with her bony hand on the coverlet. Then a sardonic, subtly malignant smile crept over her face. "We did it, Edmund. All that matters. I die in peace."

I bent nearer to her face. "He is here, Mrs. Irvyne. In the house. Outside the door."

A weak smoldering light appeared in the pits of her eyes. "Who?"

"Lazaretti."

"No!" She made an effort to lift her head, her eyes probing the dimness behind me. "Not *here?*"

"Outside the door."

"Why?"

"To pay his respects."

It was incredible to see the color rising into her blanched, sunken

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cheeks. "Ah, the fiend!"

"Will you see him? Can you?"

She rolled her head back and forth on the pillow. "Does he know about the pictures?"

"No."

"Ahhh . . let him come in. Let me *tell* the scoundrel!"

I stood erect, watching her face gathering its strength of will into her malice-brightened eyes. Then I backed away from the bed and tiptoed to the door. I opened it and nodded to Hilary.

He came into the room. I closed the door on the others and stationed myself with my back against it. Hilary stepped up to her bed and lowered himself to his knees beside it, reaching out for his mother's hand. I stole closer. I had to hear.

"It's Hilary, Mother. I've come home."

A low moan from the pillow. I craned my neck to see. She was sitting up!

"Hilary? *Hilary!*"

"I've come home, Mother. Don't you recognize me? Have I changed so very much?"

"But . . . Hilary . . No, no. He said—Lazaretti!"

Hilary turned his head to glance at me, then looked quickly back at his mother. He slid an arm around her shoulders. "They call me that in Europe, Mother. That's the name I've always painted under—Bruno Lazaretti. We weren't going to tell—Mother?"

There came from her a long, piercing, eerily inhuman cry. I approached until I could see her face clearly and, oh, what a spectacle. The horror! The horror of that look. And those eyes—flaming points of light stabbing through the dimness of the room into my face, into my very soul. She lifted an arm and pointed a shaking finger straight at me, and she spoke the last words she would ever speak.

"You knew. Edmund Lowry, *you knew!* You devil!"

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another VAN DER VALK short-short by

NICOLAS FREELING

Nicolas Freeling was born in London in 1927. As a child he lived in St. Malo, France, attended school in Paris, and went to college at the University of Dublin; he has lived in the Netherlands and now resides in France. Mr. Freeling was introduced to literature by his father who, on winning a prize in a crossword-puzzle contest, used the money to buy his son a set of the works of Joseph Conrad. After fifteen years in the hotel business all over Europe (an even better background for a writer than a set of books!), Mr. Freeling created Inspector (now Commissaire) Van der Valk of the Amsterdam Police who has become a shining light in what has been called the "new wave of thoughtful thrillers."

Here is another of his "few minutes' entertainment ... for commuters going home" ...

VAN DER VALK AND THE OLD SEAMAN

by NICOLAS FREELING

HEY, FRENCHY."

Van der Valk—in the middle of a crowded Amsterdam street, lost in thought, twenty years after last hearing that voice—turned at once. Only one person had ever called him that way. Marie had been his first girl, a big tall rakish blonde, all fire and yelling and turbulence, but with an unsuspected gentleness underneath.

She had not changed more than he had—marvelous girl, even with that squalling Amsterdam accent. That would be a "nipper" she had by the hand.

"Ee, am I glad to see you! I need help, I'm in trouble—but I can't tell you here. Can I see you somewhere?"

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"This afternoon if you like—where do you live now, though?"

"The old place—not forgotten the way?" she said, grinning.

"I'll come around at three—okay?"

Down by the docks off the Tsar Peter Stratt—did he know the way! He recalled Marie with affection whenever he was in that quarter, though he had thought she had moved long since. Her father's house—"Da," the old seaman. Must be 70 now if he's still alive.

"Come on in—coffee? Nippers are at school." It was a big flat in an old-fashioned building, with the plumbing determinedly modernized. "We moved back here when Ma died," said Marie. "I don't go much on these rotten little new houses." The race-Amsterdammer's lifelong devotion to "their quarter."

"What's the trouble?" he asked kindly.

She served coffee and a glass of very good rum instead of gin—he remembered that rum!

"It's Da I'm worried about. He's always been in the brotherhood, you know—long's I can remember he's been district treasurer. There's been a conspiracy, and some of them got arrested and they suspect him—Da!—of being a police spy. You know Da—I'm scared he'll do something real silly to prove he's a loyal member."

"Arrested, you say? Why?"

"Ach, you know. Claus—the princess' marriage—they're all anti."

Aha—the crowd who had made a noisy demonstration against the princess' German fiance because in youth he had served in the Wehrmacht. The old brigade—always against everything that had anything to do with the "bosses"—were showing what they considered the only true loyalty to the House of Orange, and above all to their beloved Amsterdam.

"Why should they think he's a spy? Da of all people."

"He's a card partner of old Wally who was on the cops for twenty years, and Wally told them they ought to be ashamed of themselves. The two of them talk too much and too loud—older they are the crankier they get. I'm most scared that some of the young ones might get it into their heads to beat poor old Da up."

The dockers! These Amsterdammers .. He was one himself, so he could understand things left unsaid. He gave her an affectionate pat on the behind as she picked the cups up for a refill.

"Paws down, Frenchy, you dirty dog."

"Where's Da now?"

"Where do you think? In the cafe—can't hold it like he used neither; gets noisy and obstinate and quarrelsome."

"I'll straighten him out. And don't worry."

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There he was, a shrimp of a man in serge trousers and plimsolls and a nautical cap—theatrically the old sailor. The buzz of talk round the bar and the pool table shushed when Van der Valk came in, and dried up dead when he showed his police card.

"Come on, Pop. I want you."

"Wants me, it says. Bleeding whippersnapper."

"Any nonsense and I'll slap you with a p.b. you'll get six months for."

"Ho. And on what charge, if I may ask his majesty Prince Charming?"

"Sedition, insulting the monarchy, and anticonstitutional conspiracy." He nearly had to laugh out loud; that meaningless string of pomposities had silenced them!

He took Da to the neighborhood police station, hunted till he found an empty room, sat the old villain down, and offered him a cigarette, which was first refused and then taken—after all, it was free.

"Don't I know you? I bleeding well do too. Twenty years ago you were hanging round my daughter Marie," the old man said triumphantly.

"That's right—and that's why I've given a hitch to the line to get you out of trouble, you silly old fool. This anti-Claus nonsense is going too far, and if there's any more of it I'll have the whole crowd broken up. I know all about the brotherhood—good, I couldn't care less, but it's you I'll hold responsible for their behavior between now and the wedding. Politics!" he spat with disgust. "You should be thinking of your grandchildren."

"You don't know nothing," said Da contemputously. "You don't even know it's me that holds the young ones back and small thanks I get—ready to believe I'm in with your smelly crowd here."

"Use your loaf, will you? Why do you think I went banging into that cafe, shouting my head off for all to hear me, flashing my badge for all to see? If I'd really wanted to pick you up I'd have done it quietly, at home. I'm going to keep you here for twenty-four hours—I'd give you a good black eye, but you'd be capable of using it against me—and then I'll turn you loose, after telling you what to do. You'll use the prestige I've given you to talk a little sense into those cretins. Being disorderly gains nothing—get that into their skulls. The girl marries a boy—throw flowers instead of stones—this is not the moment to stir up a revolution in the quarter."

"Yah. Who says I'll do all this? You?"

Van der Valk shook a finger at him. "You do it because otherwise I'll give you a real p.b.—and make your whole life a misery. And now into the cell—brown beans for dinner! I'll tell your daughter where you are."

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Marie was full of admiration.

"Cunning swine you are, Frenchy. Thanks a lot. But what did you use to twist his arm with?"

Van der Valk smiled in a Machiavellian way.

"That rum—I remember it in this house twenty years ago."

"Well, what about it?"

"Now don't be stupid, girl—ir all these years it's never paid a penny customs' duty, and that's a record Da's prouder of than anything he's ever done."

"You are a dirty dog," said Marie happily. "Have some more."

It was *very* good rum.

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A golf mystery—but you don't have to play golf to enjoy it ... a thoroughly contemporary story, oblique and sophisticated—indeed, "On the 6th Tee" could almost be called a psychedelic reading experience about bad lies and a sudden death playoff .

ON THE 6th TEE

by KATHERINE RAMBEAU

Buzz crofton stood on the 6th tee surveying the water azard. The pond seemed to simmer under the sun, and he could lmost hear the heat waves crashng in the silence of the otherwise leserted golf course. Even the ubiquitous wasps, with which he ad long had a running feud, eemed to have decided to call off ostilities for the afternoon. It vas a dead day—the best kind of lay to mull over what occupied Buzz's mind.

Behind him was a thicket, primeval in its density, with several rees twelve to fifteen feet high effectively screening the 6th tee from he 5th green; direct access hrough the thick growth had been liverted by a twisting path which ad been intended by the Committee to provide a pleasant repite from the sun. In use, howver, the pure intent and the modst confusion of the little maze had been debauched, and the thicket ad become a rendezvous for various unauthorized recreational activities of members and nonmembers alike. It was easy to vault the fence at the roadside, and most of the boys in the surrounding countryside traditionally earned their "pot" money by fishing balls out of the pond, popping out of the thicket at the 6th tee, and offering them for sale to lone golfers at attractively low prices.

Buzz pulled a cold can of beer from the little cooler on his cart and sat down on the bench to think. This was an effort at any time, for he had earned his nickname honestly. He was basically a doer.

As a matter of fact, he had intended doing this job himself. It had not been easy for a guy who usually played in the low seventies to develop a slice from the long straight drive that had been the envy of the whole club, but Buzz felt that the sacrifice was essential to the success of his scheme. He took to talking about his slice

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a lot: the incomprehensibility of his fall from perfection; the inefficacy of his best efforts to eliminate the problem. He lost no opportunity to put his newly acquired slice on record.

He would come out to the club alone at slack times and practise, playing several balls at a time as an excuse to putter around, trying out first this ploy and then that, but always, always, driving his balls from the tee with this precise and beautiful slice which he pretended to find so annoying.

Eventually, however, he began to see the fallacy of his reasoning. Even with his usual deadly accuracy he might brain the wrong victim, and he might never have a second chance. No, whatever he did would have to work the first time.

"Hey, mister." Buzz jumped, wondering if he had been thinking aloud, as usual. "I've got some good balls, mister. No cuts. Fifty cents. Twenty-five with cuts."

All 187 pounds of well-tailored Buzz Crofton recoiled from what he saw standing at the edge of the thicket. The creature was, simultaneously, both memorable and unidentifiable. Buzz thought he recognized in this apparition someone it might be good for him to know. He offered him a beer. The hairy one declined, with ceremony. From a pocket somewhere in his voluminous garment, which Buzz had not yet classified, the purveyor of derelict golf balls produced what Buzz assumed must be "joint." He sat on the ground drawing in the smoke from his cupped palm with exaggerated ecstasy. *Cornball,* thought Buzz.

"Where you from, kid?" *The farther, the better.*

"My pad's right across the road."

Buzz was puzzled for a moment. The only dwelling he knew of that fitted that location was the Kenniston Estate, a pad, as it were, encompassing a vast Italianate villa, assorted greenhouses, stables, formal gardens, and some 300 acres of woodland.

They had plotted there, Buzz and Bob Kenniston. Buzz missed good old Bob, long gone to his just deserts. Their two-boy crime wave had been the pride and delight of their fathers, both free spirits. The constabulary, however, to whom an erring motorist twice a week constituted more than enough challenge, had given three cheers when both volunteered in 1942 to go different ways. Bob had had a boy, somewhere. Surely not this lotus eater?

Still, if this *were* Bob's boy, Buzz had almost certainly found the right man for the job . . .

Paula Crofton never missed Ladies' Day, one of her few remaining concessions to femininity. She usually made a full day of it. Golf at 9:00, lunch on the terrace, a couple of drinks, tennis, and, fi

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ılly, a swim before going home dinner and Buzzie. They sel- ɔm dined out, at least not to- ɛther. They played golf separate- these days. But they still talked each other, yes, indeed.

Paula was realistic and frank ɔout her contribution to their ırtnership. Despite Buzzie, she ılt they had had a comfortable fe. She had said as much at din- er the night before: "We'd be eat- ıg roots if I hadn't taken over."

"We eat roots now," Buzz skill- ılly snubbed a parsnip to the edge f his plate.

"I can't stand the way you shove our food around, Buzzie."

"Don't call me Buzzie."

"Why not? It fits—in ever so ıany disgusting ways."

"You like Roswell better, do ou?"

Good heavens, she had almost ɔrgotten what his name was. She vas Mrs. Roswell Crofton.

Well, that could be corrected . . .

Tearing herself from her reverie, 'aula stood up from the bench nd moved away to test her golf hoes. She stooped to tighten the aces and looked up to see Buzz valking toward the first tee with ıer secretary, Sylvia, the newest ıne. Already?

"Mr. Crofton heard me tell one ıf the girls I was dying to learn o play golf." Paula had noticed he child tended to babble. "He aid if I wanted to take the day ıff, he'd give me a few pointers." Sylvia looked up at him, shy, admiring.

Paula also looked up at him, shy, admiring. "Don't get so interested in golf that you forget about your game, Buzzie." And with a glance of disbelief at Sylvia's polkadot rompers and bright pink canvas skimmers Paula clacked away briskly toward the first tee . . .

Sylvia Slonsky had been thrilled out of her mind, she had assured her roommate, when Mr. Crofton had presented her with a dozen pink golf balls at lunch the day before. He had offered the previous week, on her first day of work, to show her around the plant, and even Sylvia had recognized that most of what he knew about the place was from hearsay. However, he had made it plain he was at heart a sportsman and that the essence of executive ability was a knack for selecting trustworthy hands to do the work. By the time he had suggested lunch Sylvia was dazzled.

"Oooh, I couldn't bear to hit one of those beautiful balls, Mr. Crofton! What if I got it dirty? I might even lose one."

"Lots more where those came from, my dear."

There were, indeed, lots more. Buzz Crofton had cornered the local market. Sylvia would truly have been touched had she known the trouble he had taken to provide her with a special set, all

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pink, all marked 3. For his primary purpose one ball would have been adequate, but it had been a matter of pride for him to make such a generous gesture. Further, he had taken the precaution to provide an identically marked extra ball for himself, which he had already placed in special custody.

His weekly allowance being what it was, he had felt almost unendurable pain in disposing of 39 brand-new, top-quality golf balls: 13 pink 1's, 13 pink 2's, and 13 pink 4's. But Buzz had steeled himself for the sacrifice and turned his mind to the "how" of it.

He had never had to work at losing golf balls before. He dared not drive them off into the rough. A burly middle-aged man driving pastel-colored golf balls in broad daylight would be bound to attract unwanted attention. The trash basket was a possibility, and Buzz had tried it, but Togo the gardener had faithfully rescued them. Buzz had been hard pressed to convince him that they constituted a birthday present for Mrs. Crofton hidden there to insure surprise. He had stilled Togo's protestations about the weekly pickup with a smile that managed to be both reassuring and condescending. He had then put them in the trunk compartment of his car under the worried glance of the gardener and driven away until he could think of something else to do with them.

Reluctant to part with them without putting them to some practical use, Buzz had ended by chipping them one by one at dusk into the center of the water hazard to the scorn, pity, and mystification of a covey of small boys patiently waiting for him to go away so they could drag the pond.

The plan, Buzz thought happily, would have won Paula's appreciation, if not her approval. That Creep had suggested it to him as an alternate to his own very intricate scheme.

"Why go to all that trouble, Mr. Crofton? Just see to it the two of you are set to tee off right behind her on Ladies' Day, and when she walks up to the sixth tee I just step out and hit her with a ballpeen hammer. Hard like."

"But the ball, you idiot. The ball." Buzz wasn't about to scrap the most important part of his plan. After the "accident," Sylvia, though innocent and blameless in the tragic affair, must be convinced that the two of them could never face each other again without a pang of remorse, a sadness, a senseless but overwhelming grief of responsibility. Sylvia was a nice kid, really, just nice enough to buy the idea, and already she was a bother.

"Oh, yeah. The ball." Buzz's bizarre henchman considered the problem. "Well," he brightened, "give it to me. I'll pull it out of

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my bag and dip it in the blood, then let it roll out in the open."

Buzz suddenly felt a wave of nausea, which he tried to fight down at this graphic description of the deed. He had thought of it primarily in terms of the peace and quiet that would result, rather than the mess it would create. However, he liked young Kennis-ton's crisp approach. He felt his executive ability had done it again —put the right man in the right job.

Like Paula. He thought about cool, capable, lovely Paula again. He would have to replace Paula in the business, and that would take some doing...

Buzz came back to the present with the unhappy realization that Sylvia was still talking about those damned balls. He had been observing Paula as her foursome got underway. As usual she hit a magnificent drive from the 1st tee and waited with impatience for the other three women to get on with it. Released at last, she strode ahead of the others. Buzz noted this detail with approval. He was counting heavily on her being alone on the 6th tee for at least a full minute.

Buzz led Sylvia from the bench and gallantly teed her ball. He examined it ostentatiously.

"Always try to remember your own ball, Sylvia. This is a Lady Champ Number Three."

"And besides, it's pink!" Sylvia had a cute giggle, and her voice carried very well for present purposes. Buzz could tell from the looks exchanged that nobody had missed that. Buzz always liked to prepare the ground thoroughly.

Twenty-two shots later, as he tried to hustle Sylvia down the second fairway, Buzz could see that their timing would be off unless he did something drastic. And soon. He had thought an hour or two at the driving range would have helped things along, and so they had. Sylvia had progressed to the point of hitting the ball, sometimes, on the third try. He, therefore, determined by a quick glance at the foursome on the 4th fairway that he and Sylvia had better skip the third and fourth holes, assuming they ever finished the second, and proceed from the second green around the little stand of trees to the 5th tee.

"Oh, but Mr. Crofton," Sylvia was shocked by the suggestion, "wouldn't that be cheating?"

"Ordinarily it would, but we don't want to hold up the ladies behind us, do we?"

"But couldn't we let them play through?"

Where the devil had she picked up this piece of information? It was the one thing she knew about golf, apparently. Her girlish enthusiasm and stark honesty, refreshing as they were, were beginning to be a drag. Buzz felt a twang of his middle-aged nerves. He decid-

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ed to rely on his forceful masculine appeal. He took Sylvia's arm firmly and hustled her along toward the carts, squeezing her to him just the slightest bit as he explained he had made reservations for lunch at a lovely place that he couldn't wait to show her.

"Paula always has lunch with the girls on Ladies' Day," he assured her, letting just a hint of neglect and loneliness creep into his voice.

Eventually, in spite of Sylvia's conscience, Buzz steered her to the 5th tee, praying they were not too late. From the tee he saw Paula putt out on the fifth green, retrieve her ball, and walk toward the path through the thicket leading to the 6th tee, leaving the other three women to finish up the hole without her.

"But, Mr. Crofton"—this sprite was learning too fast—"shouldn't we wait until they get off the green? This doesn't look like a very long hole."

"They waved us on, Sylvia. They'll watch." He let fly his now-dependable slice, right into the trees, as a warning to good old Bob, Jr. to be on his toes. Sylvia, on the other hand, finally connected with a ball that flew like a bird 20 feet away into the long grass beside the fairway.

"I'll help you look for it, my dear." Mr. Crofton was so considerate. Sylvia saw him stoop to examine something in the grass.

"Just a rock, honey," Buzz said, surreptitiously pocketing her ball and continuing the search. "Must have rolled farther than we thought. Must be over there in the trees."

"I wouldn't have thought it went so far, Mr. Crofton." Sylvia's eye was getting too good. And if anyone had watched her progress, and Buzz felt sure no one had missed a thing, it would be difficult for anyone to believe that Sylvia had hit anything but the ground hard enough to bash in Paula's skull.

Paula emerged into the sunshine on the 6th tee, already carrying a battered wood which she had extracted from among her otherwise immaculate clubs. She had driven 50 miles to buy it from a charity "As Is" shop, and she had already discussed its use and disposal fully with that revolting Bob Kenniston. She had, however, been as fascinated by him as had Buzz, and she too had thought she recognized in him much of his father's potential for mayhem.

Good old Bob, Jr. popped out from behind a tree right on schedule. Paula could not help but admire his new hairdo. It must have taken someone hours of patient teasing to achieve that remarkable tangle. But it was the tiny red velvet bows almost hidden in the fullness of his beard that impressed her most. Her guess had been a shrewd one. He was Blackbeard

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personified. If he hadn't been so ridiculous she'd have been afraid of him.

"Here." Paula held out the battered club. "He's right behind me." She paused for a moment and said softly, with concern, "Hit him hard enough the first time. I don't want him to suffer."

Her voice quivered as a tear ran down her nose and caused her sunglasses to slip. Paula began to sob. "I can't go through with it. I'll have to put up with him forever."

"Look, Mrs. Crofton, why don't you just pension him off?"

"I can't. Strictly speaking, the business is his, from his father." That had been the rub all along. Paula's father had been a poet, a heavy contributor to little magazines of literary prestige. His legacy had been a study full of complimentary copies. It was to her father Paula owed her appreciation of the finer things in life. Paid bills, for instance.

"You'd better step in here, then." And Bob, Jr. gestured to someone Paula hadn't noticed before. This one held a gun.

"Paula, why don't you and Buzz behave yourselves?" The Town Constable seemed pained and he motioned her into the bushes.

"Wait out here a minute, Sylvia. I'll go in and scare off the snakes. It must be in here somewhere."

Sylvia's appreciative little gurgle penetrated the brush, and the hidden trio waited as Buzz hurried along the path once he had left Sylvia's view. Even though the sounds of feminine amusement and chagrin still floated through the air from the 5th green where the others of Paula's foursome were still trying to putt out, Buzz knew there was no time to lose. He must check to see that the Kenniston kid had arranged his part of the "accident" to perfection.

Buzz had looked in vain for a body along the path, and he had decided that Bob must have dragged Paula into the bushes That was a stupid thing to do. They would have to pull her out again, otherwise it might be weeks before anyone found her. Strange, the terrible visions the thought of this chore brought to mind. Stranger still, the sudden wave of loss, of loneliness, of deep regret.

"Where did you hide her, Bob?" He tried to keep his voice down. He must remain calm, controlled. "Hey, have you done it yet?" Louder.

He heard a rustle in the underbrush and turned to face young Timmy Saunders, the son of his nextdoor neighbor, who approached him diffidently. Timmy handed Buzz his little sister's Easter basket brimming with pink golf balls.

"Here you are, Mr. Crofton. We —the fellas and I—we've been

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watching you. All that trouble you've been having with your slice. And last night, knocking all these balls into the pond. We didn't have the heart to sell them."

As Buzz tried to think of something adequate to say he heard another rustle, off to one side. Paula emerged, still carrying the old golf club, followed by Constable Ralph Pelham, followed by Bob Kenniston. Pelham had put his gun back in the holster, but kept his hand at the ready. The young man in the handwoven nightshirt fingered his necklace with one hand and tossed a pink golf ball a few inches in the air with the other. Paula smiled grimly at her Buzzie and his little friend, Timmy.

"Which one of you is the Easter Bunny?"

Buzz glared at his wife and set the basket gently on the ground. One of the balls fell out and rolled to the feet of a newcomer to the scene—Gloria Stebbins, wife of the local bank president. Close behind Gloria, peering over her shoulder with (a) interest and (b) trepidation were (1) Alma Frocker and (2) Helen Mintz of the Friday Nighters, a ruthless association of bridge fanatics.

"Have you found it yet, Mr. Crofton?" sang the sweet voice of little Sylvia Slonsky who had at last rounded the last bend in the path and now trotted wearily into the sunshine, pulling two golf carts behind her. The sun shone gaily on two pink golf balls clipped to one of the carts.

Constable Pelham snatched the hairy monster's plaything out of the air and carefully compared it with the balls clipped to the cart. He eyed the Easter basket. He was no fool. Suddenly he knew the full perfidy of this evil plot in all its subtlety and deception. He could confirm it later, but he knew what he would find.

"What's happening?" said Alma Frocker.

"It's a community project," said Paula.

"I don't understand," said Sylvia.

"You poor child," said the Constable.

"Do you sell golf balls, too, Mr. Crofton?" Sylvia seemed to think there was nothing he couldn't do.

His pride stung, Timmy Saunders interposed indignantly, "No, I do!"

"Timmy does, too," sneered Helen Mintz. "Last week he sold me back my own ball. But these look brand-new." She leaned down and picked up a couple. "My husband sells these in his store." Righteous indignation carried her away and she snatched up the Easter basket. Two more balls rolled over the edge and into the grass.

"Put those down. They're evidence!" The Constable tugged at the basket. Balls began to spill everywhere.

"You're darned right they're evi-

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dence," yelled Mrs. Mintz, pulling back. "And we'll have them in court—and you, too! Arrest this kid!"

"You leave that child alone, Helen! Those are mine." Buzz had finally thought of something to say.

"Yours? They're pink! Really, Buzzie!" Alma Frocker had always thought Roswell Crofton would bear watching.

Paula wasn't sure she knew what the situation was, but Helen and Gloria had been even more irritating than usual this morning, and Paula and Alma hadn't spoken in years. Paula's mood called for immediate and decisive action.

"Those are my golf balls," she said in a voice no one cared to dispute. "Buzz must have shopped the whole state to find those pink golf balls for me. Get your hands off of them, all of you!" And she began snatching golf balls from Sylvia's cart. "You're fired."

Juggling the eleven balls from Sylvia's cart, Paula approached Timmy, who had regained custody of the Easter basket and had retrieved the balls from the grass. She dumped them in. "Thank you, Timmy. I'll take them now." Paula walked quickly over to the water's edge. She gave the basket a heave. The balls sank. The basket floated. She threw in the wretched club she had driven so far to obtain.

"Hey, that's evidence," yelled the Constable.

"If there's anything I can't stand it's pink golf balls," Paula managed through clenched teeth as she passed her husband.

Buzz had been staring at Bobbie, Jr. There was something he longed to know, but it didn't seem the best time to bring it up. The exotic young man read the glance and answered it with an easy smile—a satisfied, fatuous smile, it seemed to Buzz. Constable Pelham also read the glance and interpreted it correctly.

"He's writing his thesis," the Constable said, as if that explained everything.

"I started out on Police Brutality, but so far I haven't been able to pin down how Constable Pelham intimidates his victims."

"Intimidate, hell! We haven't interrogated anybody all summer except a lost two-year-old who couldn't remember his own name."

"You see," said Kenniston to the fascinated audience, "the depths to which these Totalitarians will stoop?"

"What does Police Brutality have to do with us?" inquired Paula. She was always one to keep her eye on the ball.

"Oh." The bearded boy seemed disappointed at the way it had all turned out. "Nothing, now. I had sort of hoped—but no matter. I can switch over to Suburban Mores."

"Oh, come off it, Bob," said Buzz.

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"Bob is only my earthly name," orated the shaggy traitor. "I am the Harbinger of Joy."

"The what?" said Buzz.

"The Harbinger," said Paula.

"Of Joy." The Harbinger beamed. "Well, I'd better split." He glanced kindly at Sylvia. "Come away with me, my fair Hebe. We will dally at my pad—make love, not war."

Sylvia looked uneasily at the widening circle of the Croftons' acquaintances gathered on the 6th tee. "I guess you two would like to be alone," she said with the delicate insight of youth.

"Not particularly," snapped Paula.

"Well, thanks for everything." Sylvia lifted her chin with an almost inaudible sniff, a lady to the end.

Buzz defined the glance that Sylvia cast at the scruffy young man now clinging to the fence: it was shy, admiring. Paula took note of the way his long dirty toes curled around the fence: admirably functional.

The self-styled Harbinger of Joy looked down benignly on all below. He removed one ring-encrusted hand from the fence and raised it in patient benediction before reaching down to assist Sylvia up and over:

"Love!" he intoned. "Peace!"

'O'

NEXT MONTH . . .

10 *NEW* short stories—including

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Steve Frazee's First Prize Winner of 1952 is the story of a manhunt, of a posse tracking down four escaped convicts. The chase will take you over ridges and slide-rock trails in the far West, through canyons and forests and over snow-capped mountains. You will be outdoors for the next half hour or so, even while you are sitting in your favorite snug chair at home, and you will learn what it means to be the hunter, and what it means to be the hunted.

This manhunt is literally that—deadly pursuit, through golden fields and green meadows, past lakes and swamps and beaver ponds, into the wide-open spaces—the deadly, age-old pursuit by Society (with a capital) of its outlaw members—the deadly, age-old, relentless pursuit by men of men—and especially of man (without the capital) ...

MY BROTHER DOWN THERE

by STEVE FRAZEE

NOW THERE WERE THREE LEFT. Here was the fourth, doubled up on his side at the edge of the meadow grass where the wind had scattered pine needles. His face was pinched and gray. Big black wood ants were backing away from the blood settling into the warm soil.

Jaynes turned the dead man over with his foot. "Which one is this?"

Holesworth, deputy warden of the State Penitentiary, gave Jaynes an odd look.

"Joseph Otto Weyerhauser," he said. "Lifer for murder."

Deputy Sheriff Bill Melvin was standing apart from the rest of the posse. He had been too deep in the timber to take part in the shooting. He watched the little green State patrol plane circling overhead. It was a windless day. The voice of the mountains spoke of peace and summer.

Joseph Otto Weyerhauser. Spoken that way, the words gave dignity to the fugitive who lay now on the earth in the pale green

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uniform that had been stolen from the wash lines of a little filling station a hundred miles away.

Sid Jaynes was a beefy man with dark eyes that glittered. Jaynes had not known who the convict was and he had not cared. The green pants and shirt, when Weyerhauser tried to run across the head of the little meadow, had been enough for him.

"He played it like a fool," Jaynes said. "He could have stayed in the timber."

"You made $12.50 with each one of those shots, Jaynes." The deputy warden's voice ran slowly and deliberately.

"Let the State keep their twenty-five bucks," Jaynes said. "I didn't come along for that." His rifle was a beautiful instrument with a telescopic sight. The dead man lay beside a sawed-off shotgun and a .38 pistol taken from a guard he had slugged with a bar of soap in a sock. "Why didn't he stay in the timber, the damn fool?"

"They're all city boys," Holesworth said. "He was heading for the highway."

It put you on the wrong side of your job to make a comparison between the dead man's short-range weapons and the rifles of the posse, Deputy Bill Melvin thought. Weyerhauser had been one of four prison escapees. He had taken his big chance with the others, and here it had ended.

That was all there was to it; but Melvin wished he did not have to look at Weyerhauser or hear any more from Jaynes, who was always the first man to reach the Sheriff's office when the word went out that a manhunt was on. Jaynes, who ran a garage, never came when help was needed to find a lost hunter or a wrecked plane.

Sheriff Rudd spoke. Sheriff Rudd was a veteran of the open-range days of men and cattle. He stood like a rifle barrel, tall and spare. His face was bony, with a jutting nose.

"There's three more," the Sheriff said. "All tougher than Weyerhauser." He squinted at the green plane, now circling lower in the trough of the mountains. "Call that flyer, Melvin. He's buzzing around this basin like a bee in a washtub. Tell him to get up in the air. Tell him about this and have him call the patrol station over the hill and see if anything has popped there."

Deputy Melvin started back to the horse with the radio gear. Jaynes called, "Ask him if he's spotted any of the other three."

Melvin paid no attention.

"One twenty, ground party, Stony Park."

"Ground party, go ahead."

"Get some altitude. You're making Sheriff Rudd nervous."

"What does Rudd think I am? There's a hell of a wind up here.

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What happened down there?"

"We got Weyerhauser. Dead. Call Scott and Studebaker on the roadblocks."

"Stand by," the pilot said.

Melvin leaned against the mare. She moved a little, cropping grass, switching her tail at deer flies unconcernedly, while Melvin listened to the plane call across the mountains. Jaynes's sleeping bag was on the crosspieces of the pack saddle, put there to protect the radio from branches.

Jaynes walked over. "Has he spotted—?"

"I didn't ask," said Melvin.

"Why not?"

"He would have said so if he had."

"Well, it won't hurt to ask. Maybe—"

"Go collect your twenty-five bucks, Jaynes."

"What do you mean by that?"

Jaynes did not understand. He never would.

"Ground party, One twenty," the pilot said. "Negative on all roadblocks and patrol cars."

"Thanks, One twenty. Call Studebaker again and have an ambulance meet us at the big spring, east side of Herald Pass, at one this afternoon."

"Okay." The plane began to climb. Melvin watched until it gained altitude and shot away across the timbered hump of Herald Pass.

"That's a hell of a note," Jaynes complained. "Guys like me come out here, taking time off from our business just to do what's right, and you don't even ask whether he's spotted the others or not."

Melvin pulled the canvas cover back over the radio. "Four times twenty-five makes a hundred, Jaynes. What are you going to buy with all that money?"

"I give it to the Red Cross, don't I!"

"You mean that first twenty-five you knocked down—that little forger? I remember him, Jaynes. He came out of a railroad culvert getting his hands up, scared to death, and you cut loose."

Jaynes was puzzled, not angry. He said, "You talk funny for a deputy sheriff, Melvin. You sound like you thought there was something nice about these stinking cons. What are we supposed to do with them?"

Melvin went back to the posse. Deputy Warden Holesworth had searched the dead man. On the ground was a pile. Candy bars, smeary and flattish from being carried in pockets; seven packs of cigarettes.

"One down and three to go," Jaynes said. "Where do we head now, Sheriff?"

Sheriff Rudd looked around the group. Two or three of the men sitting in the grass had already lost stomach. Rudd named them and said, "Take that sorrel that's started to limp and pack Weyer-

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hauser up to the highway."

"At the big spring on the east side," Melvin said. "There'll be an ambulance there at one."

"I've got to get back myself," the deputy warden said. "Tomorrow I'll send a couple of guards out. We can fly in Blayden's hounds from up north—"

"I don't favor hounds," the Sheriff said. "Keep your guards, too, Holesworth. The last time you sent guards we had to carry 'em out. You keep 'em sitting in those towers too much."

"That's what they get paid for, not for being Indian guides and cross-country men. To hell with you." They grinned at each other. Then Holesworth gave Jaynes another speculative glance and helped lift Weyerhauser onto the lame horse.

That left seven in the posse. They divided the cigarettes. Small ants went flying when someone gave the pile of candy bars a kick. One chocolate bar, undisturbed by the boot, was melting into the earth beside the other stain.

Two days later Sheriff Rudd cut the trail of three men whose heelprints showed P marks in the center. Rudd swung down and studied the tracks, and then he took the saddle off his gelding.

"What's the stall?" Jaynes asked. "That's the track of our meat, Rudd."

"A day and a half old, at least. Give your horse a rest." The Sheriff sat down on a log and began to fill his pipe.

Melvin walked beside the footprints for several steps. He saw the wrapper of a candy bar lying on the ground. Four days on candy and desperation. The poor devils. Poor devils, hell; the candy had been stolen from the filling station where they had slugged a 60-year-old man, the desperation was their own, and they were asking for the same as Weyerhauser.

Melvin looked up at the gray caps of the mountains. They ran here in a semicircle, with only one trail over them, and that almost unknown. If these tracks with the deep-cut marks in the heels continued up, the fugitives would be forced to the forgotten road that led to Clover Basin. From there the trail went over the spine at 13,000 feet.

It was a terrible climb for men living on candy bars. Melvin went back to the resting posse, saying nothing.

"Clover Basin, maybe?" Sheriff Rudd asked.

Melvin nodded.

"Why haven't the damn search planes seen them?" Jaynes asked.

"There's trees and rocks, and the sound of a plane engine carries a long way ahead." Bud Pryor was a part-time deputy, here now because he had been called

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to go. He was a barrel-chested man who could stop a barroom fight by cracking heads together, but he didn't care much for riding the mountains. And he didn't care at all for Jaynes.

"Any other stupid questions, sharpshooter?" Bud Pryor asked Jaynes.

The Sheriff got up. "Let's go."

They rode into the first of the great fields of golden galliardia at the lower end of Clover Basin. The buildings of the Uncle Sam Mine hung over the slope at the upper end like gray ghosts. Rudd stopped his horse. The others crowded up behind him.

Motion started at the highest building and sent small points out on the slide-rock trail. "Hey!" Jaynes cried. Both he and Melvin put glasses on the tiny figures scrambling over the flat gray stones. Two men in green uniforms. Two men who ran and fell and crawled upward toward the harsh rise of Clover Mountain.

Jaynes let his binoculars fall on the cord around his neck. He raised his rifle, sighting through the 'scope. Some sort of dedication lay in his glittering eyes, some drive that made Melvin look away from him and glance at the Sheriff.

Rudd, however, without the aid of glasses, was watching the fleeing men on the eternal stones of Clover Mountain.

Jaynes kicked his horse ahead. "Come on!"

"Get off and lead that horse a while, Jaynes," the Sheriff said. "You've knocked the guts out of him already the last few days."

"There they are!" Jaynes gestured with his rifle.

"And there they go." Rudd got down and began to lead his horse.

"Now what the hell!" Jaynes twisted his face. "They're getting away—farther out of range every second!"

"They're a mile airline. It'll take us the best part of two hours to reach the mine," Sheriff Rudd said with weary patience. "And then it will be dark. Go on, Jaynes, if you want to, but leave that horse behind."

"It's mine."

"You'll leave it behind, I said."

Jaynes looked through his 'scope and cursed.

"Three came in here," Bud Pryor said. "Go on up and kick that third one out, Jaynes. He's there."

"How do you know?" Jaynes's voice was not large.

Pryor's thick lips spread in a grin. He was still sweating from the last steep hill where they had led the horses. "Gets chilly mighty quick in these high places, don't it?"

Rudd started on, leading his horse. It was dusk when they closed in on the bunkhouse of the Uncle Sam Mine, working around from the rocks and com-

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ing closer in short rushes to the toe of the dump. Jaynes and Melvin went up the dump together until their heads were nearly level with the rusted rails that still held rotting chocks.

"I'll cover you from here," Jaynes said. "This 'scope gathers light so a man can't miss."

Melvin raised his head above the dump. An evening wind drove grouse feathers across the yellow waste toward him. He saw a rat scurry along the ledge of a broken window and then sit still, looking out. Inside, two or three others squealed as they raced across the floor.

Melvin scrabbled on up and walked into the bunkhouse. Two rats carrying grouse bones ducked through holes in the floor. One-half of the roof was caved in but the other end, where the stove sat with its pipe reduced to lacy fragility, was still a shelter.

The stove was warm.

Here, for a time, three men had stayed. They were city-bred, and so this man-made shell seemed the natural place to take shelter. No outdoorsman would have sought the rat-fouled place, but the escaped prisoners must have received some small comfort from it.

Instinctively they had huddled inside this pitiful ruin for the security that all pursued mankind must seek. And now, caught by the dusk and the silence, looking through a window at the mighty sweep of the high world, Bill Melvin was stirred by a feeling for the fugitives that sprang from depths far below the surface things called logic and understanding.

"What's in there?" Jaynes called.

Melvin stepped outside. "Nothing."

Jaynes cursed. He climbed to the dump level and stared at the dim slide-rock trail. He fondled his rifle.

Pryor's voice came from the lower buildings, high-pitched and clear, running out to the walls of the great basin and echoing back with ghostly mockery. "Nothing in any of these, Sheriff!"

"Let's get on the trail!" Jaynes yelled.

"Come down here," Sheriff Rudd said, and both their voices ran together on the darkening rocks.

Melvin and Jaynes rejoined the others. Melvin was dead-weary now, but Jaynes kept looking at the sliderock, fretting.

"We can't get horses over that slide-rock at night," Rudd said. "And maybe not in daylight. We'll camp here tonight."

"And all that time they'll be moving," Jaynes objected. "Are you sure you want to catch them, Sheriff?"

"They'll be feeling their way down the worst switchbacks in these hills," Rudd said. "On empty stomachs."

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"Like hell!" Jaynes said. "They've been living like kings on grouse."

"One grouse," Melvin said.

"They must be getting fat." Rudd pointed to the floor of the basin. "We'll camp down there and give the horses a chance to graze."

"And make this climb again in the morning," Jaynes said disgustedly.

Dew was gathering on the grass when they picketed the horses. All the chill of the high-country night seemed to have gathered in the enormous black hole. They ate almost the last of their food at a fire built from scrubby trees.

Jaynes cleaned his rifle before he ate. He rubbed the stock and admired the weapon, standing with the firelight glittering in his eyes.

"What will that pretty thing do that a good Krag won't?" Bud Pryor asked.

Jaynes smiled and let the answer gleam in the reflection of the flames.

"Somebody will have to start out tomorrow for grub," the Sheriff said. "How about it, Jaynes?"

"I can live on the country," Jaynes said.

"Yeah." The Sheriff unrolled his sleeping bag. "One hour each on guard tonight. Not at the fire, either. Stay out by the horses. I'll take it from three till dawn."

Jaynes peered into the darkness. "You think the third one is around in the rocks, huh?"

"I think the horses can get all tangled up. The third man went over the hill a long time ago," Rudd said.

"How do you know that?" Jaynes asked.

"Because I'm betting it was Marty Kaygo. He's the toughest and the smartest. He wouldn't sit in that eagle's nest up there, hoping nobody comes after him."

"Kaygo, huh? What was he in for?" Jaynes stared toward the gloomy crest of the mountain.

"He killed two cops." Rudd took off his boots, pulled his hat down tightly, and got into his sleeping bag. "He killed them with one shot each." The Sheriff was asleep a few moments later.

Jaynes set his rifle on his sleeping bag and began to eat. "Who are the other two?"

"Don't you even know their names?" Melvin asked.

"What's the difference if I don't?"

Maybe Jaynes was right. It had to be done, one way or another; names merely made it harder. "Sam Castagna and Ora L. Strothers," Melvin said. "Castagna used to blow up rival gamblers for a syndicate. Strothers specialized in holding up banks."

"Ora L. That's nice and gentle, a con having a name like that," Jaynes said.

"Don't you give him the right

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to have a name?" Melvin asked. "Don't you give him the right to be a human being?"

Jaynes looked blank at the anger in Melvin's voice. "What is it with you, anyway? You and Rudd both talk like it was a crime to send those bastards rolling in the grass."

Rolling in the grass. That was exactly what had happened to Weyerhauser when Jaynes's second shot ripped through his belly.

Melvin walked away from the fire suddenly, into the cold dark layers of the night. The possemen were sacking out. Jaynes squatted near the fire alone, eating, a puzzled expression on his face. Bud Pryor, stripped down to long underwear and his boots, came over and stood beside the flames for a few minutes, warming his hands.

Dislike of Jaynes and a sort of wonder mingled on Pryor's fleshy face. He parted his thick lips as if to speak. But then he left the fire and settled into his sleeping bag, grunting.

The night was large and silent. Up toward the knife edge of Clover Mountain two men had scrambled across the rocks, crawling where slides had filled the trail. Two men running for their lives.

Melvin kept seeing it over and over.

Castagna's sentence had been commuted to life just two days short of the gas chamber. Strothers had never killed a man, but he was cold and ruthless. Marty Kaygo, who must have gone across the hill before the others, was in debt to the law 180 years. This was his third escape from prison.

They were all no good, predators against society. But ... In the solemn night, with the tremendous peace of the mountains upon him, Bill Melvin stared uneasily at the line which must run from crime to punishment.

Ordinarily he did not allow himself to be disturbed like this; but Jaynes, scraping the last of his supper from a tin plate, had kicked over the little wall that divided what men must do from what they think.

"I'll take the first watch," Melvin said.

Jaynes came out from the fire. He spoke in a low voice. "It's only nine o'clock. Barker's got a flashlight. We could slip up on the slide-rock trail—there's patches of snow there—and see for sure if they all three crossed."

"Why?"

"If one is still here he'll try to slip out of the basin tonight. We could lay out in that narrow place and nail him dead to rights."

"I'll take the first watch." Melvin walked deeper into the night, trembling from high-altitude fatigue, mouthing the sickening aftertaste of Jaynes's presence.

"Why not, Melvin?"

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"Go to bed!" Melvin snapped.

Sometimes a healthy man does not sleep well at great altitudes, and so it was with Melvin this night. When Jaynes relieved him, Melvin heard the beefy hunter going down the basin past the horses. He knew that Jaynes would make for a place where he could command the narrow entrance to the basin, and that he would lie there, patiently, his rifle ready.

Melvin wondered if his eyes would glitter in the dark.

Jaynes stayed his watch, and the watch of the man he did not waken for relief.

Dawn slid across the peaks. Light was there when dew and gloom were still heavy in the basin. The Sheriff and Pryor cooked the last of the bacon and opened the last two cans of beans.

Jaynes saddled up and led his horse toward the fire before he ate. "What kind of rifle was it this—what was his name, Kaygo? —stole at the filling station?"

"A .30-06," Rudd said. There were pouches under his eyes this morning, and he looked his years. He stared through the smoke at Jaynes. "New one. He took five boxes of shells, too, Jaynes. They're hunting cartridges."

"I've got a few expanding noses myself," Jaynes said. "Let's get started."

Rudd spat to one side. "You're like a hog going to war."

Bud Pryor laughed. The other manhunters stared at Jaynes or at the ground. They seemed ashamed now, Melvin thought, to be a part of this thing. Or a part of Jaynes.

Pryor said explosively, "I'll go in after chow today, Sheriff. Me and Jaynes."

"No!" Jaynes said. "I can live on the country. Me and Melvin can keep going when the rest of you have to run for a restaurant."

Rudd said to Pryor, "You and Barker, then. It's closer now to Scott than it is to Studebaker, so we'll split up after we cross the hill. Try the radio again, Melvin. Maybe nobody will have to go in."

"No contact," Melvin said later. "When we get to the top we can reach out and make it."

They took the slide-rock trail from the dump at the side of the bunkhouse. In passing, Melvin noticed that the grouse feathers were almost entirely blown away.

Seventy years before, jack trains had used the trail; but now the years had slid into it. The posse led their horses. Sparks from steel shoes in the stretches where the ledge still showed drill marks; a clattering and a scramble, with the horses rolling their eyes when they had to cross the spills of dry-slippery rocks.

In the snowbanks the tracks of three men; and one man had gone about a day before the others.

There lay the ridge, half a mile ahead. On the left, where they

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traveled, the mountain ran down wildly to ledges where no human being would ever set foot.

They lost the little radio mare. She slipped and fell and then she was threshing over and the slide-rock ran with her. She struck a ledge and was gone. The rocks kept spilling down a thousand feet below.

Rudd patted the neck of his frightened gelding. "There went a damn good little mare."

Jaynes said, "They don't exactly give those radios away, either. My sleeping bag cost sixty-two bucks."

They came out on the wedge-top and went down three switchbacks to let the horses take a blow out of the wind. A dozen lakes were winking in the sunlight. The mountains on this side ran in a crazy pattern. Every major range in the United States runs north and south, with one exception; but from the pinpoints where a man must stand, the north-south coursing is often lost or does not exist at all.

There was no highway in sight, no smoke, just the vast expanse of timber with the gray-sharp slopes above and the shine of beaver meadows where little streams lay separated from each other by ridges 8000 feet high.

"A regiment could hide out down there all summer," Rudd said. "But these guys will most likely keep running downhill, hoping to hit a highway sooner or later."

Jaynes's rifle was in his hands, as usual when he was on foot. He pointed with it. "I know every inch of that country. I've fished and hunted all through it."

"Don't be a fool," Sheriff Rudd said. "I rode that country before you were born, and I discovered a new place every time I went out. And I could do the same for a hundred years." Rudd shook his head. "Every inch of it . . .!"

Jaynes said, "I can find any tenderfoot that tries to hide out down there." He patted the stock of his rifle.

"Goddamn you, Jaynes! I'm sick of you!" Melvin cried. "Keep your mouth shut!"

Jaynes was surprised. "Now what did I say? Have you got a biting ulcer or something, Melvin?"

"Let's go on down," Rudd said.

Melvin's stomach held a knot that eased slowly. For a moment he had seen the land without a man in it, forgetting even himself as he stood there on the mountain. But Jaynes would never let a man forget himself for long.

In the middle of the morning the green plane came over and circled them. The pilot was calling, Melvin knew, but they had no way now to listen or call back. After a while the plane soared away over the green tim-

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ber and drifted on toward Scott.

They struck the timber. Fallen trees lay across the trail, slowing the horses. There were still three men ahead.

"Planes, radios, horses—what the hell good are they?" Jaynes said irritably. "In the end it comes down to men on foot closing in on each other."

"Like you closed in on the Uncle Sam bunkhouse, huh?" Pryor asked. "Hand to hand, tooth and toenail."

"Strip down to a breechclout, Jaynes," Rudd said. "I'll give you my knife and you can go after Kaygo properly."

Barker said, "Yeah, why don't you do that, Jaynes? You big-mouthed bastard, you."

Barker had little imagination. He was a sullen man who would kill the fugitives as quickly as Jaynes. All that motivated Barker now, Melvin thought, was a desire to transfer the cause of his hunger and weariness to another human being. Jaynes had already been marked by him as a target.

"I don't understand you guys, so help me," Jaynes said.

Melvin felt a flash of pity for him; the man really did not understand. What made Jaynes tick probably was as obscure as the forces that had sent the men he so greatly wanted to kill into a life of crime. Somebody ought to be able to figure it out . . .

The big buck flashed across the narrow lane in a split second. The smaller one that followed an instant later was going just as fast. Jaynes broke its neck with one shot.

The thought of fresh liver relieved some of Melvin's dislike of Jaynes. "Nice shooting, Jaynes."

"Thanks."

"I'll eat that thing without skining it," Bud Pryor said. He had his knife out already and was trotting ahead.

Jaynes sat on a log and cleaned his rifle while Pryor and Melvin dressed the buck. Jaynes had merely glanced at it and turned away.

"He's larded up like first-class, grass-fed beef," Pryor said. "Lucky shot, Jaynes."

"I seldom miss a running target." Jaynes spoke absently, looking ahead at the trees.

Pryor sent Melvin a helpless look. "It sure looked lucky to me."

"No luck at all," said Jaynes. "It's simple if you have the eye for it."

Pryor made a motion with his knife as if to cut his own throat. He and Melvin laughed. For a few moments Jaynes was no problem to them.

"Sling it on a horse," Sheriff Rudd said. "We can eat when we get to Struthers' sawmill set."

"Struthers? That's one of the men we want," Jaynes said.

"Different spelling," Rudd said. "Jumbo Struthers has been dead

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for forty years, and the sawmill hasn't run for fifty-two years."

"We could dig him up," Pryor said, grinning, "so Jaynes could shoot him."

For the first time Jaynes showed anger. "Why do you keep needling me? What are we out here for, anyway? You act like there was something wrong in what we're doing!"

"We're here to bring back three men, dead *or* alive," Rudd said. "Let's go."

The trail expanded into a logging road, with live trees trying to close it out and dead trees trying to block it. Mosquitoes came singing in from a marsh on the left. Already tormented by the snags on fallen timber, the horses shook their heads as the insects buzzed their ears. Pryor kept swinging his hat at blowflies settling on the carcass of the deer. "The good old summertime," he said. "How'd you get me out here, Sheriff?"

"You were getting fat, so you volunteered."

The small talk irritated Jaynes. "We're not making much time," he said. Later, after a delay to lever aside a tangle of dead jackpines, he went ahead in a stooping posture for several steps. "One of the boys ain't doing so good all at once."

Melvin studied the tracks. One man had started to drag his leg; a second one was helping him. The third track was still older than these two. Farther down the road a punch mark appeared in the soil. One man was using a short pole as a cane.

Jaynes wanted to race away on the trail. "We'll have that one before long!"

"Hold up." The Sheriff stopped to fill his pipe. "I'd say the fellow twisted a muscle or sprained his ankle trying to jump that tangle we just cleared out. The other one will leave him, that's sure."

"The old ranger lean-to in Boston Park must be pretty close," Jaynes said. "Half a mile, I'd say."

"About a mile," Rudd said.

Melvin knew about it, the big lean-to sometimes used by fishermen and hunters. Man had made it, and the fact would seem important to the men ahead. Considering the tracks of the injured fugitive, Melvin wondered if the convict would last to Boston Park.

"If he's bunged up as bad as it looks he's likely ready to quit," Rudd said.

"He won't give up," Jaynes said. "He'll make a stand."

The Sheriff narrowed his eyes at Jaynes. "Why will he, if he's hurt?"

"If he's been left at that lean-to he's the loneliest man in the world right now," Melvin put in.

"Yeah?" Jaynes kept edging ahead. "I'm not walking up on that hut to find out how lonely he is."

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"Nobody is," Rudd said. "When we get close, two men will take the horses. The rest of us will cut off into the timber and come in from all sides of the lean-to. He may not be there at all."

The lean-to was set between two trees on high ground, clear of the swamp that edged the beaver ponds. Generations of outdoorsmen had piled boughs along the sides and on top until the shelter was a rust-brown mass. That it had not been burned by a careless match long ago spoke tersely of the nature of the men who came far into the mountains.

Melvin and Sheriff Rudd came to the edge of the trees a hundred yards apart. They waited for Pryor, on the right. Barker and Jaynes were to ease out of the trees on the left, Barker to cover the back of the shelter, Jaynes to prevent escape farther to the left.

There had been a fire recently among the blackened stones before the lean-to. Fine ashes stirred there, lifting to a little wind that rolled across the beaver ponds and whispered through the grass.

Melvin saw Pryor come to the edge of the trees and signal with his hand. Barker slipped to the cover of a windfall behind the shelter. He wagged his rifle.

Inside the lean-to a man cleared his throat.

Melvin sank to one knee behind a log.

The Sheriff said, "Come out of there! You're boxed. Walk out with your hands up!"

"I can't walk," a voice replied.

"Come out of there. We'll rip that place apart with bullets if I have to ask again."

The brittle needles scraped against each other. A chunky man whose face was black with beard came on hands and knees from the hut. He was wearing a soiled, torn green uniform, too small for him. One pants leg was gone below the knee.

"Toss your pistol away," Rudd ordered.

"No gun." The man clawed against one of the trees. He pulled himself erect. "No gun, you stinking, dirty—" He started to fall and made a quick grab at the crosspiece of the shelter.

A rifle blasted from the edge of the timber beyond Barker. The man at the lean-to fell. He was dead, Melvin was sure. "Watch him! Watch him!" Jaynes called. "It's just his arm!"

Melvin and the Sheriff walked in then. The man had been shot through the left hand, a thick hand, by a soft-nosed hunting bullet. The palm was torn away and the fingers were spread like the spokes of a shattered wheel. The man rolled on his side and put his broken hand under his arm.

"My leg was cracked before." He cursed. "Now look at it!" The leg was really broken now; it had

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twisted under when the man fell. Melvin searched him and found two packs of cigarettes.

Barker came around the hut. Jaynes arrived on the run. "I could just see his arm when he grabbed for his gun!"

"He grabbed, all right," Sheriff Rudd said. "To keep from falling on a busted leg."

"Oh!" Jaynes stared down. "It looked to me like—"

"Shut up." Rudd yelled at the timber where the two men were holding the horses. "Bring 'em on!" There was a first-aid kit on Melvin's horse.

"Which one is this?" Jaynes asked.

"Sam Castagna." Suspected of seven murders, convicted of one, sentence commuted to life. "Where's Strothers, Sam?"

"Run out on me." With his face against the brown needles Castagna tried to spit explosively. It merely dribbled from his mouth and hung in his black beard. He cursed in Italian, glaring up at Jaynes.

Barker said, "No gun anywhere around the hut. They had two sawed-offs and two .38 pistols, besides the rifle Kaygo swiped at the filling station."

The horses came in at a trot. Pryor circled the swamp and plodded through the grass. He looked at the wounded man. "Castagna, huh? Nice boy who likes to put bombs on car starters. The other two are still going down the trail, Sheriff."

"Straight to a highway," Rudd said. "Let's patch him up and move on."

"I'm going to eat here," Pryor said, "if you have to leave me. I'm going to beat the blowflies to some of that deer." He began to build a fire.

Melvin and Barker made splints for Castagna's broken leg. They wrapped his hand. He watched them stolidly. When they pulled his leg he ground his teeth and sweated. Melvin got him a drink of water afterward.

"Thanks." Castagna held the cup in a trembling hand, slopping part of the water down his chin and into the thick black hairs at the base of his neck.

"Where's Strothers and Kaygo, Castagna?" Jaynes asked.

Castagna looked hungrily at the meat that Pryor was roasting on a green limb. He lay back on the ground and closed his eyes. There was a depression under his head and it caused his face to tilt straight into the sun. Melvin took off his coat and rolled it under the wounded man's head.

They squatted around the fire, roasting cutlets chopped from the loin with a hand ax, too hungry to bother with a frying pan. Blood from half-raw meat ran down their chins when they chewed.

None of us is far removed from the wolf, Melvin thought; but

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there is a difference between men like Rudd and Sam Castagna. There has to be. Yet where was the difference between Castagna and Jaynes, who cleaned his rifle before he ate?

Melvin glanced at the gleaming weapon, laid carefully aside on the dry grass. He felt an urge to hurl the rifle far out into the beaver pond.

Sheriff Rudd ground his meat moodily. "I never used to stop when I was on the chase. We stop to gorge ourselves while a desperate man keeps going. The difference is he *has* to get away and we don't *have* to catch him."

"Him? Who do you mean?" Jaynes asked. "Why don't we have to catch him?"

"Oh, hell," Rudd said. "Gimme the salt, Barker."

"I don't understand what—" Jaynes said.

"Before we leave here, Jaynes, you throw into that pond every damn hunting bullet you got," Rudd said. "I'm going to watch you do it."

They all looked at Jaynes. He could not grasp the reason for their hostility. "Shells cost money. I'll use that old coffee can over there and bury them under the lean-to. Next fall I'll be through here hunting."

"Do that then," Rudd said. "Every damn soft-nose you got." But Rudd seemed to find no satisfaction in the trifling victory.

He knew he was only scratching at the surface, Melvin thought.

The Sheriff twisted around toward Castagna. "Some deer meat, Sam?"

"Yeah. Yeah, let me try it." Castagna ate greedily, and then he lost everything before they could get him onto a horse.

The green plane was cruising southwest of them. A few minutes later it came over Boston Park, dipping low. It went southwest again, circling six or seven times.

"Uh-huh," Rudd said.

"He must be over the Shewalter Meadows," Jaynes said. "That's all down-timber between here and there."

"Not if you know the way from the sawmill set." Rudd swung up. "Catch Castagna if he starts to fall."

There were still two sets of mantracks down the logging road. Just before they reached the sawmill site they found a sawed-off shotgun laid across a log, pointing toward one of the sawdust piles near the creek. Under it an arrow mark scratched in the black soil pointed in the same direction.

"Now that's a cute trick," Jaynes said. He sighted through his 'scope at the sawdust piles, age-brown mounds blending into the wilderness. He was suspicious, but he was confused.

"It reads to me that Strothers wants to quit, and wants to be

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sure we know it," Rudd said.

"Suppose he's still got the pistol? Suppose it's Kaygo?" Jaynes asked.

"Most likely Kaygo is over there where the plane was circling," Melvin said. Kaygo had left the others at the Uncle Sam Mine. The Sheriff, at least, was sure of that, and Melvin had accepted it. Still, he did not like the quiet of the sawdust piles, warm and innocent-looking out there by the creek.

Rudd said, "Come on, Melvin. The rest of you stay here. Take Castagna off the horse and let him lay down a while."

"I'd better—" Jaynes said.

"Stay right here," the Sheriff said.

Rudd and Melvin leaped the creek and tramped on the spongy surface of the sawdust piles. In a little hollow of the shredded wood they found their man, asleep.

His blond whiskers were short and curly. The sun had burned his face. His green shirt, washed recently in the stream, was spread near him and now it was dry. His heavy prison shoes were set neatly together near his feet.

"Strothers, all right," Rudd said. "Wake up!"

The man was snoring gently. He jerked a little but he did not rouse until Rudd tossed one of the shoes on his stomach. Strothers opened his eyes and yawned.

"What kept you so long?" he asked.

Cold and deadly, the bulletins had read; he had never killed a man, but he had always entered banks prepared to kill. He had studied law, and later, engineering. It was said that he could have been successful in either. Now he sat on a pile of sawdust in the wilderness, ready to go back to the isolation cells.

"Local yokels, eh? I didn't think those lazy bastards of guards would come this far. Got anything to smoke, Constable?"

"Where's Kaygo?" the Sheriff asked.

Strothers yawned again. He felt his feet. "Talk about blisters!" He began to put on his shoes. "Why, Marty left us at a rat hole on the side of a cliff day before yesterday."

"We know that," Rudd said.

"That's why I mentioned it." Strothers reached toward his shirt.

"Hold it!" Melvin picked up the shirt. There was no weight in it, nothing under it. He tossed it to Strothers who rose and began to put it on.

"Where's the other .38?" Rudd asked mildly.

"The other? So you got Weyerhauser. Can I have a smoke?"

Melvin lit a cigarette and tossed it to Strothers. The Sheriff and his deputy glanced quickly at each other.

"I don't know who's got it,"

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Strothers said. The horses were coming out of the timber.

He saw Castagna. "Did you ask Sam?"

The Sheriff's eyes were tight. He spoke easily, "Sam's clean. You look clean. So Kaygo's got it. Why'd you give up, Strothers?"

"Too much of nothing here. No future." Strothers grinned, dragging on his cigarette, watching the horses from the corners of his eyes. The surface was smooth, but there was steel savagery underneath. Castagna was a bully who had graduated to bombs on car starters and bundles of dynamite against the bedroom walls of gambling kings; Strothers was everything the long F.B.I. reports said.

"You could have given up with Castagna," Melvin said.

"That two-bit character! I play it alone." Strothers puffed his smoke. "Do I get some chow?"

"Yeah," Rudd said. "Half-done venison."

"Raw will be fine, Constable."

"Walk on over toward the horses," Rudd said. "When I say stop —stop."

"Sure, Constable. Just don't stall. I want to get home as soon as possible. I'm doing some leather work that can't be neglected."

Not the usual bravado of a petty criminal—Strothers was too coldly intelligent for that. He was spreading it on lightly for another purpose. He wouldn't have much luck with Rudd, Melvin knew. Let him find it out himself.

Strothers limped ahead of them. "When my last blister broke, that was when I decided to hell with it."

"Right there, Strothers," Rudd said, when they were twenty feet from the horses. With the exception of Jaynes the posse was relaxed. The first heat of the chase had been worn from them, and this third easy victory coming toward them was nothing to cause excitement.

Rudd nodded at Melvin, making a circle with his finger in the air. Melvin walked wide around Strothers and freed his lariat from the saddle.

"The great big Strothers, he comes easy," Castagna said sullenly.

Strothers ignored Castagna; his eyes were on the rope in Melvin's hands. Barker and the others looked at Strothers dully, but Jaynes sensed what they did not. He pushed his 'scope sight down and raised his rifle.

"Never mind!" Rudd said sharply, standing several paces behind Strothers. "Put that rifle down, Jaynes. Drop your pants, Strothers."

Strothers smiled. "Now look, Constable ..." He was watching the loop in Melvin's hand.

And that was when Rudd stepped in and slammed Strothers to the ground with the butt of his rifle. Melvin drove in quickly

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then. Strothers was enough for the two of them for a while, but they got his arms tied behind him at last.

The little automatic, flat, fully loaded, was tied with strips of green cloth from Castagna's pants leg to the inside of Strothers' thigh. Castagna cursed bitterly, clinging to the saddle horn with his one good hand.

"Why didn't you search him right at first?" Jaynes demanded angrily.

"It takes more steam out of them to let them go right up to where it looks like it's going to work," the Sheriff said. "Build a fire, Pryor. We may as well eat again before we split up."

Strothers chewed his meat with good appetite. He had struggled like a wolf, but that was done now and his intelligence was at work again. "What tipped it, Constable—the cigarettes?"

"Partly," Rudd said. "You wouldn't have left both packs with Sam unless you figured to be with him soon. That wasn't too much, but I knew you would never go back down the river and let them say Ora L. Strothers was caught asleep and gave up without a fight. You really were asleep, too —on purpose."

"Sure. I got the nerve for things like that. It made it look real." Strothers' good nature was back, but he was not thinking of his words. His mind, Melvin knew, was thinking far ahead now, to another plan, setting himself against walls and locks and ropes and everything that could be used to restrain a man physically, pitting his fine mind against all the instruments of the thing called society.

There was a lostness in him that appalled Melvin. Strothers was a cold wind running from a foggy gorge back in the dawn age of mankind. The wind could never warm or change or remain confined. Compared to Strothers, Sam Castagna was just a lumbering animal that knocked weaker animals out of the way.

"You would have taken Castagna with you, if you could have knocked a couple of us off and got to the horses?" Melvin asked.

"Sure," Strothers said. "We planned it that way."

That was talk to be repeated in the prison yard, to be passed along the corridors of the cell block. Talk to fit the code. But not to feed the vanity of Ora L. Strothers, because it was a lie. Let Castagna, lying feverishly on the ground in Melvin's jacket, believe what Strothers said. Castagna had been left behind to build up the illusion that desperate men would surrender without a fight. That he was injured and had to be left was not primary in Strothers's mind; it was merely helpful coincidence.

"Which one of us was to 've

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been first?" Melvin asked.

Strothers wiped his lips. "You, I thought. Then I changed my mind." He glanced at Jaynes.

"Yeah," Jaynes said. "I read you like a book. I wish you had tried something, Strothers."

The two men stared at each other. The antagonism that separated them was as wide as the sky.

"I'll bet you're the one shot Sam," Strothers said. "Did you shoot Joe Weyerhauser, too?"

Jaynes did not answer. Watching him, Melvin thought: he lacks the evil power of Strothers' intelligence, and he lacks the strength of natural good. He doesn't know what he is, and he knows it.

Strothers smiled. "I've taken half a million from the banks and never had to shoot a man. You, Snake Eyes, you're just a punk on the other side because you don't have the guts and brains of men like me. How about it?"

Jaynes leaped up. His wasp voice broke when he cursed Strothers. He gripped his rifle and stood with the butt poised to smash into Strothers' face.

"Whoa there, Jaynes!" Sheriff Rudd said, but it was not he who stopped the rifle. With his legs tied and one arm bound behind his back, Strothers looked at Jaynes and smiled, and Jaynes lowered his rifle and walked away. After a few steps he turned toward the creek and went there, pretending to drink.

Barker and Pryor stared at Strothers. "Don't call *me* any of your names," Barker growled.

Strothers looked at him as he might have glanced at a noisy child; and then he forgot them all. His mind was once more chewing facts and plans, even as his strong teeth chewed meat.

If this man had been led by Marty Kaygo, what kind of man was Kaygo? thought Melvin.

Rudd said, "I'll take everybody in but you and Jaynes, Melvin. Do you feel up to staying on the trail?"

There was no place where a plane could set down to pick up Castagna. Two and a half days out, Melvin estimated. Rudd would need five men to keep an eye on Strothers day and night. They were out of food, too.

"All right," Melvin said.

Jaynes had overheard. He came back from the creek. "I'm staying, too."

Strothers smiled.

"I'll send the green plane over Shewalter Meadows three days from now," Rudd said. "With grub. Now what else will you need?"

"Send me another coat," Melvin said. "Send Jaynes another sleeping bag. We both better have packs, too."

The Sheriff nodded. He put Strothers on a horse and tied him there. They lifted Castagna to the

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saddle again. He was going to suffer plenty before they reached the highway. Castagna looked at Melvin and said thickly, "Thanks for the coat."

Strothers smiled at Melvin from the corner of his eyes. The smile said: Chump!

A hundred yards down the creek a logging road took off to the left, and there went the tracks of Marty Kaygo. Melvin and Jaynes walked into second-growth timber. The sounds of the horses died away. Under his belt Melvin was carrying the pistol he had taken from Strothers.

Jaynes said, "I damn near smashed that Strothers' ugly face."

"Uh-huh."

"You can't hit a man tied up like that, not even a pen bird."

"No."

"Of course not," Jaynes said.

The road began to angle to the right,—along a ridge.

"This won't take us straight to where the plane spotted Kaygo," Jaynes said. "Let's cut into the timber."

"I'm staying with his tracks. I don't know what that plane was circling over."

The road turned down the ridge again, on the side away from Shewalter Meadows. Kaygo's tracks were still there, but Jaynes was mightily impatient. "I'm going straight over the ridge," he said.

"Go ahead," Melvin answered.

"Where will I meet you then?"

"At the Meadows."

"You sure?" Jaynes asked doubtfully.

"This old road runs into one hell of a swamp before long. I'm betting he went to the Meadows, but I'm going to follow his trail all the way."

They separated. Melvin was glad. He wanted to reduce the chase to the patient unwinding of a trail, to an end that was nothing more than law and duty; and he could not think of it that way so long as Jaynes was with him.

Where the swamp began, Kaygo had turned at once up the ridge. There was something in that which spoke of the man's quality, of an ability to sense the lie of a country. Most city men would have blundered deep into the swamp before deciding to turn.

Jaynes was right about down timber on the ridge, fire-killed trees that had stood for years before rot took their roots and wind sent them crashing. Melvin went slowly. Kaygo had done the same and before long Melvin noticed that the man had traveled as a woodsman does, stepping over nothing that could be walked around.

Kaygo would never exhaust himself in blind, disorderly flight. What kind of man was he?

Going down the west side of

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the ridge, Melvin stopped when a grouse exploded from the ground near a rotting spruce log. He drew the pistol and waited until he saw two others near the log, frozen in their protective coloration. He shot one through the head, and five more flew away.

Now an instrument of the law had broken the law for a second time during this chase; but there were, of course, degrees of breakage. A man like Strothers no doubt could make biting comments on the subject.

Melvin pulled the entrails from the bird and went on, following Kaygo's trail. The man had an eye for terrain, all right. He made few mistakes that cost him time and effort, and that was rare in any man crossing unfamiliar, wooded country.

A woodsman at some time in his life? Melvin went back over Kaygo's record. Thirty-five years old. Sixteen of those years spent in reformatories and prisons. An interesting talker. Athletic. Generally armed, considered extremely dangerous. Approach with caution. The record fell into the glib pattern of the words under the faces on the bulletin board in Rudd's office.

Gambles heavily. If forced to work, seeks employment as clerk in clothing store... There was nothing Melvin could recall to indicate that Kaygo had ever been five miles from city pavements.

The sun was getting low and the timber was already gathering coolness in its depths when Melvin came out on a long slope that ran down to the Meadows, two miles away.

Where the sun still lay on a bare spot near a quartz outcrop Melvin stopped, puzzled by what he saw. The mark of the steel butt-plate of Kaygo's rifle and the imprint of his shoes, one flat, the other showing no heelprint, said that Kaygo had squatted near the ant hill; four cigarette butts crushed into the ground said that he had been here for some time.

Coolness had dimished the activity of the ants, but they were still seething in and out of their dome of sand and pine needles; and Kaygo had squatted there for perhaps an hour to watch.

It was Melvin's experience that some perverseness in man causes him to step on ant hills or to kick them in passing. This one was undisturbed. Kaygo had watched and gone away. Melvin had done the same thing many times.

What if I have and what if he did also? he asked himself. Does that change what I have to do? But as he went on, Melvin kept wondering what Kaygo had thought as he squatted beside the ant hill.

Near dusk Melvin lost the trail where the wide arm of a swamp came up from the drainage basin

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of the Meadows. But Kaygo was headed that way, Melvin was sure. One gentle turn too far to the left, back there on the long slope, would have sent Kaygo into the ragged canyons near the lower end of the Meadows.

He must have spotted the place from the top of Clover Mountain; but seeing from the heights and finding from a route through timber-choked country are two different things.

Kaygo had a fine sense of distance and direction, though. I can grant him that, Melvin thought, without feeling anything else about him to impede my purpose. The purpose—and Melvin wondered why he had to keep restating it—was to bring Marty Kaygo out, dead or alive.

On the edge of Shewalter Meadows, where the grass stood waist-high to a man all over the flooded ground and the beaver runs that led to the ponds out in the middle, Melvin stopped behind a tree and scanned the open space. There was only half light now, but that was enough.

Beavers were making ripples in the ponds and trout were leaping for their evening feeding. The Meadows lay in a great dogleg, and the upper part was cut from Melvin's view by spruce trees and high willows. The best windfalls for sleeping cover were up there, and that was where Jaynes would be, undoubtedly.

Let him stay there tonight alone. Sooner or later Melvin would have to rejoin him, and that would be soon enough. Melvin went back into the timber and cooked his grouse. He ate half of it and laid the rest in the palm of a limb, head-high.

The night came in with a gentle rush. He dozed off on top of his sleeping bag, to awaken chilled and trembling some time later. The night was windless, the ground stony. Melvin built up the fire and warmed himself by it before getting into his sleeping bag.

Dead or alive. The thought would not submerge.

One Kaygo was a vagueness written on a record; Melvin had learned of another Kaygo today. They made a combination that would never give up.

If Melvin had been here just to fish and loaf, to walk through the dappled fall of sunshine in the trees, and—yes, to be caught away from himself while watching the endless workings of an ant hill; to see the sun come and go on quietness; to see the elk thrusting their broad muzzles underwater to eat; to view all the things that are simple and understandable . . . then, he knew, he would be living for a while as man was meant to live.

You are Bill Melvin, a deputy sheriff. He is a man called Kaygo, an escaped murderer.

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Dead or alive ...

He came from dreamless sleep when the log ends of the fire were no longer flaming but drizzling smoke across a bed of coals. He felt the presence near him by the rising of the hackles on his neck, from deep memories forgotten by the human race.

Carefully, not breaking the even tenor of his breathing, he worked one hand up to the pistol on the head shield of the sleeping bag.

The man was squatted by the fire with a rifle across his knees. His curling brown hair caught a touch of redness from the glow of embers. The light outlined a sandy beard, held steady on wide cheekbones, and lost itself in the hollows under massive brows. The man's trousers were muddy as high as the knees where the fabric was strained smooth by his position. They might have been any color. But there was no doubt that the shirt was green.

The face by itself was enough.

It was Marty Kaygo.

He was eating what was left of Melvin's grouse.

He turned the carcass in his hands, gnawing, chewing; and all the while his face was set toward the shadows where Melvin lay.

Slowly Melvin worked the pistol along the edge of the ground until, lying on his side, he raised it just a trifle. The front sight was a white bead that lined across the coals to Kaygo's chest. Melvin's thumb pushed the safety down.

Kaygo's long rifle cartridges—just spots of lead that could sing over space and kill. Kaygo the cop-killer. Speak to him, tell him to put up his hands and let his rifle fall. If he swung the rifle to fire, the pistol could also sing and kill.

From where did the whisper come that fire and food must be shared even with a deadly enemy? From the jungle all around that might pull them both beneath its slime an instant later?

The sabre-tooth tiger and the great reptiles were out there in the night. And men were men together, if only for a moment. The jungle was not gone, merely changed.

Melvin let the pistol rest on the ground.

Marty Kaygo rose. He was not a tall man. Even in his prison shoes he moved lightly as he stepped to a tree and replaced the carcass of the grouse. He grinned, still looking toward where Melvin lay.

And then he was gone.

Melvin lay a long time before he fell asleep again.

When he rose in the bitter cold of morning he went at once to the dead fire. There were the tracks. He took the grouse from the limb. One leg was untouched.

Staring out to where the first long-slanting rays of the sun were

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driving mist from the beaver ponds and wet grass Melvin held the chilled grouse in his hands.

What's the matter with me?

The truth was, Jaynes was Melvin and Melvin was Jaynes, great developments of the centuries; and Kaygo did not fit where they belonged. But . . .

Melvin shivered.

He went out of the timber into the sunshine, and he sat down to let it warm him while he ate the rest of the grouse. There before him, leading through the gray mud out toward the wickerwork of the beaver dams, were the tracks of Kaygo. He had crossed the boggy ground by night, walking the beaver dams above deep water, returning the same way. It was not an easy feat even in daytime.

I wish I could talk to him, Melvin thought. I wish . . .

The shot was a cracking violation of the wilderness quiet. It came from somewhere around the dogleg of the Meadows.

Melvin went back to the camp site and got his gear.

Before he turned the dogleg he saw Jaynes coming toward him. Jaynes stopped and waited.

"What the hell happened to you, Melvin?" There was blood on Jaynes's shirt.

"I followed his trail, just as I said I would. You shoot a deer?"

"Yeah. That's one thing there's plenty of here. Kaygo's around. I saw his tracks in the upper part of the Meadows last night. We'll get him. I know every inch—"

"Let's get at the deer."

They roasted meat, and then Jaynes was impatient to be off.

"Just hold your steam," said Melvin. "We've got another two days before the plane drops chow, so we're going to start drying some of this meat."

"There's lots of deer."

"We'll dry some of this. We don't know where that plane will drop our supplies, or what they'll be like when we get to them. And you're not going to shoot a deer every day, Jaynes."

They cut the meat in thin strips and laid it on the gray twigs of a fallen tree until the branches were festooned with dangling brown meat. Camp-robber birds were there at once, floating in, snatching.

"How you going to stop that?" Jaynes asked.

"By staying here. I'm going to do some smoking with a willow fire, too. Take a turn around the Meadows. See what you can find out. You know every inch of the land."

"I'll do that." Jaynes took his rifle and strode away.

He was back at noon. "Where'd you camp, Melvin?"

Melvin told him.

"Well, he was there, this morning. He crossed the swamp and went back the same way. He's in

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ıe timber on this side somewhere. He's getting smart now about overing his tracks."

"What's he eating?" Melvin sked cleverly.

"I don't know, and I don't are. He slept one night under a vindfall. Where'd he learn that, Melvin?" Jaynes was worried.

"I think it must come to him ıaturally. He's probably enjoying nore freedom right now than he's ıad in his whole life."

Jaynes grunted. He eyed the tree hat was serving as a drying rack. 'Hey! Do you suppose we could ull him in with that?" He look-:d all around at the fringe of rees. "Say we go down into the imber on the other side and then ircle back to that little knob ver there ... About three hun-lred yards." Jaynes rubbed the ily sheen of his rifle barrel. 'One shot, Melvin."

"You think he's hungry enough o try it?"

"He must be."

"The birds will scatter our meat."

"Part of a lousy deer or one jailbird! What's the matter with you, Melvin?"

The venison was not going to cure before the plane came in and Melvin knew it. He had stalled long enough.

They went a half mile beside the lower Meadows. On the way Jaynes stepped sidewise to jump into an ant hill and twist his feet; and then he went on, stamping ants loose from his shoes. "He must be hungry enough by now."

They went back through the timber and crept behind a log on the little hill across the field from their camp. The smoky birds were having a merry time with the meat.

Now Jaynes was patient. His eyes caught every movement across the park, and his position did not seem to strain his muscles. They stayed until the shadows lowered cold on their backs. It was then that they heard the rifle shot somewhere in the lower Meadows, two miles away.

"He's got his own meat." Melvin laughed.

Jaynes rose. "What's so damn funny about it?"

Melvin had wrapped his undershirt around a venison haunch, but the blowflies had got to it anyway. He brushed the white larvae away.

They roasted meat and ate in silence.

Marty Kaygo was still around Shewalter Meadows. They cut his sign the next day, and they found where he had killed the deer. The convict was here, and it seemed that he intended to stay.

Jaynes was infuriated. And he was speechless for a while when they returned to camp that night and found that Kaygo had stolen Melvin's sleeping bag.

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"Who are the tenderfeet around here?" Melvin laughed again.

"You don't act like you want to catch him! By God, I do, and I'll stay here all summer to do it, if I have to!"

"To catch him?"

"To kill him! I'm going to gut-shoot him for this little trick!"

"You would have anyway." There was no humor now in stealing the sleeping bag.

The plane came in on the afternoon of the third day. Clouds were scudding across the peaks and the pilot was in a hurry to beat out a local storm. He banked sharply to look down at the two men standing in the open dryness of the upper Meadows.

He went on east, high above the timber. They saw him fighting a tricky wind. On the next bank he kicked out the box. The parachute became a white cone. Lining out with a tailwind boosting him, the pilot sped away toward Scott.

"If he had any brains he'd've stayed to make sure we got it," Jaynes said. "Typical State employee."

A great windfront flowing in from the mountains struck them with a chill that spoke of the rain soon to follow. Melvin watched the plane bouncing jerkily in downdrafts above the canyons. "The pilot's all right, Jaynes."

"Look at that thing drift!"

They knew for sure after another few moments that the box would not land in the upper Meadows. Melvin said, "Wouldn't it be something if it lit right at Kaygo's feet?"

"Big fine joke, huh?"

They trotted across the creek and down along the edge of the Big Shewalter to keep the 'chute in sight. They were a long way from it when they saw it splash into the water near the opposite side of the flooded area. An instant later the rain boiled down on them.

"I hope they had sense enough to put the stuff in cans." Jaynes turned up the collar of his jacket.

The ponds were dancing froth now. Through the mist they saw Kaygo run from the timber and wade out after the box.

Jaynes dropped to one knee. He pushed his 'scope down and began to click the sight adjustment. "Eight hundred yards," he muttered. His rifle bellowed with the thunder on the mountains. "Where'd I hit?"

"I couldn't tell."

The first hard blast of rain was sweeping on. Jaynes fired again, and this time Melvin saw the bullet strike the water to the left of Kaygo, chest-deep now, towing the box to shore with the shroud-lines of the 'chute.

"About five feet to the left," Melvin said.

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Kaygo sprawled into the grass when the next shot came.

"That did it," Melvin said.

"No! He ducked."

Kaygo raised up. Skidding the box over wet grass and mud, he reached timber while Jaynes tried two more shots. Over that distance, through wind and rain, Jaynes had performed well—but Kaygo was still free.

Kaygo's boldness was worth applause, but Melvin felt only a bleak apathy. The end had been delayed, that was all.

"Come on!" Jaynes said.

"Across that open swamp? No, thanks. We'll work through the timber."

"He's got our stuff!"

"He's got a rifle, too."

The box had been fastened with wing nuts, easy to tap loose. The packs Melvin had asked for were gone, and the jacket, and about three-fourths of the food, Melvin estimated. The sleeping bag had been unrolled. Rain was filtering through the pines on a manila envelope containing a note.

They peered into the gloom of the wet forest. It was no time to press Kaygo hard, they knew.

While Jaynes raged, Melvin read the note.

"Rudd started in at noon today with big posse. He says not to take any chances. He says there were *two* .22 pistols and a hunting knife taken from the filling station."

"That's a big help!" Jaynes cursed the weather, the pilot, and the stupidity of circumstance.

"I told you on Clover Mountain I was sick of you, Jaynes. Now shut up! You're lucky Kaygo didn't slice your sleeping bag to pieces or throw it into the water."

"I'm fed up with you, too, Melvin! You didn't even try to shoot a while ago. You act like the stinking louse is your brother!"

My brother. The thought plowed through Melvin, leaving a fresh wake. It was not yet fashionable to speak of men as brothers; you killed your brother, just like anybody else.

They plodded toward camp, carrying the cans of food in their hands. The labels began to soak off. Melvin finished the job on the cans he was holding.

"That's smart," Jaynes said. "Now what's in them?"

"You're right, they're no good to us any more. A hungry man has to know what he's getting." Melvin began to hurl the cans into a beaver pond, until Jaynes pleaded with him.

"Then shut your mouth for a while!" Melvin cried.

They went on to camp through a cold rain that soaked into Melvin's soul.

"Soup!" Jaynes said later, when they sat under a dripping tree before a smoking fire. "Kaygo's back in the timber having hot coffee

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and plenty of canned chicken."

Jaynes could not destroy everything, for he had the unrealized power to give laughter. Melvin began to laugh while Jaynes stared at him angrily. Was it the sound of laughter, as well as the smell of fire, that caused the monsters of the long-ago jungle to raise their heads in fear?

"I said I'd get Kaygo if it took me all summer. You sit here and laugh, Melvin. *I'll get him!*"

They found the second pack the next morning, empty, hanging on a tree. "He's cached part of the grub somewhere," Jaynes growled. "He couldn't have put it all in one pack. Smart! He did it in the rain, and now we can't backtrack him."

But they could trail him in the fresh dampness. Kaygo had realized that, too; he had gone far south of the Meadows, and on a rocky ridge they lost his trail. The ridge was a great spur that ran down from Spearhead Mountain, bucking through lesser cross-ridges arrogantly. The lower end of it, Melvin knew, was not eight miles from the highway.

"Maybe he's clearing out," Jaynes said. "He read that note about Rudd. He knows he's going to get it. He's headed for the highway now. Somebody else will get him, after all we've done!"

"Pathetic, ain't it?" Melvin looked at Spearhead Mountain. "Maybe he went that way. He really likes these mountains."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing you'd understand. He's gone toward Spearhead, Jaynes."

"The highway! I'm going after him, Melvin. If I don't cut his trail by the time I hit Bandbox Creek, I'll come back. Don't sneak off this time and camp by yourself. He could have walked right in on you that night."

"Yes, he could have killed me, I suppose."

Jaynes's eyes narrowed. "Those tracks beside your fire the next morning—one of yours was on top of one of his, Melvin. He sneaked in while you were asleep, didn't he? And you were ashamed to mention it to me! It's a wonder he didn't take your rifle and sleeping bag right from under you. I'll mention that to Rudd when he gets here."

"You do that, Jaynes." Harlan Rudd had shared food and fire with outlaws in the old days, and he was not ashamed to talk about it now that he was Sheriff. "Get out of my sight, Jaynes, before I forget I'm a brother to you, too!"

"Brother?" Jaynes gave Melvin a baffled look before he started down the ridge.

There was something Kaygo could not have known about this ridge: it appeared to be the natural route to Spearhead, but high-

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up it was a jumble of tree-vered cliffs.

Melvin stayed on it only until found where Kaygo had slip-d from his careful walking on cks and left a mark which he d tried to smooth away. Then elvin left the ridge and took a undabout, but faster, route to-ard Spearhead.

He went too rapidly. In mid-ternoon he saw Kaygo far be-w him, between two curving but-esses of the mountain. The fugi-ve was not pushing himself.

While Melvin watched through is glasses, Kaygo removed the olen pack and lay down in a eld of columbines, pillowing his ead on the stolen sleeping bag. he wind was cold on Melvin's veating skin as he hugged his antage point behind the rocks.

Jaynes might have made a shot om here; he would have tried, lthough the range was 400 yards reater than yesterday across the lig Shewalter. Melvin knew his wn rifle would do no more than care Kaygo down the hill.

Like hunting sheep, he thought. ou have to wait and try to ake them blunder into you.

Kaygo lay there for an hour. He was not asleep. He moved ccasionally, but mostly he lay here looking at the sky and louds.

He was wallowing in freedom; hat was it. Damn him! He would ot do what fugitives are sup-posed to do. He insisted on act-ing like a man enjoying life.

My brother down there, Melvin thought. Yes, and I'll kill him when he comes near enough on the saddle of the mountain.

Kaygo rose at last, but he did not go. He stretched his arms to the sky, as if he would clutch a great section of it. Then he sat down and smoked a cigarette.

The sweat was tight and dry on Melvin. The wind scampered through his clothing. Of course I have to kill him, he told himself. He's found something he loves so much he won't be taken from it any other way.

Kaygo went up at last. Melvin slipped behind the rib of the mountain and climbed steadily. The wind was growing quiet now. There was a sullen heaviness in the air. It would rain again today.

Melvin was far ahead when he took a position among rocks that overlooked the saddle. He could see Kaygo, still in no hurry, coming up the harder way, coming over a red iron dike that had made the notch on Spearhead back when man clutched his club and splashed toward refuge as the clamor broke out in the forest.

It was his job. Society paid him, Melvin reminded himself. Climb faster Marty Kaygo. You will have your chance to go back where you belong, and when you refuse, the job will be done quickly.

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The air grew heavily quiet. Melvin blinked when he heard a tiny snap and saw a blue spark run along his rifle barrel. He rubbed his hand against his woolen shirt. His palm crackled with pinpoint sparks and the fibers of the sleeve tried to follow the hand away. He stroked his hair and heard the little noises and felt the hair rising.

All this was not uncommon on the heights in summer when a storm was making, but Melvin had never experienced it before. It gave him a weird sensation.

Kaygo came into the saddle when the air was fully charged. He jumped when blue light ran along his rifle barrel. He was then 200 yards away from Melvin. He would have to pass much closer. Kaygo stared in wonder at his rifle, and then at the leaden sky.

He held up his hunting knife. Sparks played on the point. Kaygo laughed. He raised both knife and rifle and watched the electricity come to them.

A little later he discovered that steel was not necessary to draw static from the swollen air. Kaygo's fingers, held aloft, drew sparks. He did a dance on the rocks, shouting his wonder and pleasure. Strange balls of light ran along the iron dike and the air was filled with a sterile odor.

This day on Spearhead Mountain, Marty Kaygo roared with joy.

Melvin had never heard laughter run so cleanly. Laughter fro the littered caves above the slim laughter from the tree perch sa from walking beasts; laught challenging the brutes ...

It did not last. The rain ca just after the first whistling surg of wind. The bursting air cleare

Kaygo trotted easily for shelte his head lowered against the pe of ice. He came straight towar the rocks where Melvin lay. The was a clatter somewhere behin Melvin, granite slipping on grar ite, but he had no time to won der.

"Kaygo!" he yelled. "Drop it!

The man threw up his hea as he ran and he brought th rifle up, not hesitating.

My brother, Melvin thought That held him one split secon longer, with his finger on th trigger and his sights on Kaygo' chest.

Another rifle roared behin him. Kaygo's legs jerked as h tried to keep running. He wen down and his hands reached ou for the wet stones. That was all

Jaynes came limping through the rocks. "I hurt my knee, bu I got him, rain and all!"

Melvin could not rise for a mo ment. He felt frozen to the rock

At last he came up, slowly.

"You were right," Jaynes said "He took the hard way. After left you I got to thinking tha was what he would do."

They went across the stones to

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ygo. Jaynes turned him over. eart. I said I didn't miss run- ıg shots, not very often." That s all the interest he had in ırty Kaygo; and now that van- ed, too.

aynes slipped the pack from : dead man's back. "Steal our ɔw, would he! Grab your sleep- ; bag and let's get out of here. ıdd and the others can take e of the chores now. Four for ır, Melvin."

'You're counting Strothers?"

'I wish that bigmouth had tried nething."

The rain was the coldest that er fell on Melvin. He unrolled e sleeping bag and covered Kay- with it, weighting the sides th stones.

Jaynes started to protest, but ar the end he helped. "I guess en Kaygo deserves something. e wasn't a bad-looking charac- : at that, was he?"

All this time Melvin had not looked at Jaynes. Now he picked up Jaynes's rifle. Deliberately, Melvin began to smash it against a rock. He splintered the stock and the forestock. He bent the bolt and he battered the 'scope until it was a twisted tube hanging by one mount, and he continued to beat the breech against the rock until the front sight ripped his palm and the impacts numbed his wrists.

He dropped the rifle then and stood breathing hard.

Jaynes had cursed loudly at first, but then he had stopped. The hard glitter was gone from his eyes.

Now, in the voice of a man who lives with splinters in his soul, Jaynes said, "By God, you're going to buy me a new rifle, Melvin. What's the matter with you, anyway?"

Melvin said nothing. Then together they started down the rain-soaked mountain ...

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THE ONE-TO-TEN AFFAIR

by MICHAEL GILBERT

THE NOTICE, IN FIRM BLACK LETters on a big white board, read: "War Department Property. Keep to made tracks. If you find anything leave it alone. IT MAY EXPLODE." Beside it, a much smaller, older, faded green board read: "Hurley Bottom Farm—One Mile."

Mr. Calder read out both notices to Rasselas, and added, "You'd better keep to heel and leave the rabbits alone." Rasselas grinned at him. He thought that Salisbury Plain was a promising sort of place.

Man and dog set off down the path. After half a mile it forked. There was nothing to indicate which fork to take. Mr. Calder decided on the right-hand one, which went uphill and looked more attractive.

It was a windless autumn day. As they reached the top of the rise they could see the Plain spread round them in a broad arc, wave behind wave, all soft greens and browns, running away to the horizon, meeting and melting into the gray of the sky. Two pigeons got up from a clump of trees and circled at a safe distance from the man and the dog. A big flock of

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fieldfares swung across the sky, thick as black smoke, forming and reforming and vanishing as mysteriously as they had come.

Mr. Calder unslung his field glasses and made a slow traverse of the area. Rasselas sat beside him, a tip of pink tongue hanging out of the side of his mouth.

When the voice spoke it was unexpectedly harsh, magnified by the loudspeaker. "You there, with the dog!"

Mr. Calder turned slowly.

It was an army truck, and a blond subaltern in battle dress, with the red and blue flashes of the Artillery, was standing beside the driver.

"If you go much further, you'll be in the target area."

Mr. Calder said, "Well, thanks very much for telling me." By this time he had got close enough to the truck to see the unit signs. "I'm too old to be shot at. Don't you think your people might have put up some sort of warning?"

"The red flags are all flying."

"I must have missed them. I was looking for Hurley Bottom Farm."

"You should have forked left a good quarter of a mile back. We ought to put a notice up there, I suppose. All the locals know it, of course. I take it you're a stranger?"

"That's right," said Mr. Calder. "I'm a stranger, and if it's crossed your mind that I might be a Chinese spy, I could refer you to Colonel Crofter at Porton. He'll giv you some sort of character for me I daresay."

The boy smiled, and said, " didn't think you were a spy. Bu I thought you might be going t get your head blown. It causes a lot of trouble when it happens Courts of inquiry and goodnes knows what. That's a lovely dog What sort is he?"

"He's a Persian deerhound. They need them to hunt wolves, actually."

"He looks as if he could deal with a wolf, too. Are you a friend of Mrs. King-Bassett? Or perhaps you were just going to ride."

Mr. Calder looked blank.

"She owns Hurley Bottom Farm —the place you said you were going to. And runs a riding stable. A lot of our chaps go there."

"To ride?"

"That's right." The boy, who seemed to think he had said too much, added abruptly, "You'll find the turning back there."

Mr. Calder thanked him and trudged off. As he did so, the battery, tucked into a valley to his right, opened up, and a salvo of shells came whistling lazily over, and landed with a familiar *crump-crump* in the dip to his left.

The path to Hurley Bottom took him away from the ranges and into farmland. The soil was Wiltshire chalk with a thin crust of loam. It would not be very productive, he imagined. At a point

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where the path ran between two thorn hedges he heard a sudden thundering of hoofs behind him, and removing himself with undignified haste to one side, tripped, and landed on all fours.

"What the boody hell do you think you're doing?" inquired a magnificent female figure, encased in riding breeches, riding boots, a canary yellow turtle-necked sweater, and a hard hat, and mounted on what appeared to Mr. Calder, from his worm's-eye view, to be about thirty foot of chestnut horse.

He climbed to his feet, removed a handful of leaf mold from his right ear, and said, "This is a public footpath, isn't it?"

"It also happens to be a bridle path," said the lady.

Mr. Calder had had time to look at her now. He saw a brick-red but not unhandsome face, sulky eyes, a gash of red mouth, and a firm chin.

"When you come round a corner as fast as that," he said, "you ought to sound your horn. I take it you're Mrs. King-Bassett?"

"Correct. And if you're looking for a ride I'm afraid all my horses are booked just now."

"Oddly enough, I was simply going for a walk."

"Then let me give you a word of warning. Don't bring your dog too near the Farm. I've got an Alsatian called Prince. He's a killer."

"We will both bear it in mind," said Mr. Calder. Rasselas grinned amiably.

The Cathedral clock sent out its sixteen warning notes into the still, bonfire-scented air, and then started to strike nine times. The radio set in Canon Trumpington's drawing room said:

"This is the nine o'clock news. Here are the headlines. In Chinese Turkestan an earthquake has destroyed sixteen villages. After a football match in Rio de Janeiro the crowd invaded the field and was dispersed by tear gas. A subsequent bayonet charge resulted in twenty-five casualties. There has been an unexpected rise of twenty-seven percent in the price of copper. The death toll from the as yet unexplained outbreak of cholera at the Al-Maza Military Research Station near Cairo has now risen to seven and includes a number of Egypt's leading scientific experts. Professor Fawazi, head of the establishment, who was seriously ill is now off the danger list. The death toll in Aden—"

"For heavens' sake," said Mrs. Trumpington. "Turn that voice of doom off, Herbert."

Canon Trumpington stretched out a hand and peace was restored to the pleasant room in the South Canonry. In the garden outside an owl was serenading the full moon.

"Is it my imagination, or does

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the news seem to get worse and worse?"

"There wasn't much to cheer anyone up tonight, I agree. What do you say, Behrens? Is the world running down? Are we all on our way out, in a maelstrom of violence and silliness?"

Mr. Behrens said, "Is it the world that's getting old? Or is it us? The older we get, the more we value calm and peace, and a settled routine. Our nerves aren't as strong as they were. Things which look like desperate threats to us—if we were forty years younger they might look like adventures."

"I may be old," said Mrs. Trumpington with spirit, "and I may be nervous, but I can't see how anyone, whatever their age or state of health, could regard a thousand people being wiped out in an earthquake as an adventure."

"Certainly not. But the first reaction of a young man might not be one of horror. It might be a desire to go out and help."

Mrs. Trumpington snorted. The Canon said, "He's quite right, you know." He made a mental note for his next sermon.

"And what about those poor Egyptian scientists?"

"There," said Mr. Behrens, "I must confess that my own reaction was one of incredulity. Cholera, nowadays, is controllable by quite simple forms of immunization. If the outbreak had been in some primitive community where serum was unobtainable—but in a scientific institution—"

"It said an *unexplained* outbreak. Might it be a new and more virulent type?"

"It's possible. I remember when I was in Albania before the war a particularly unpleasant form of skin disease, akin to lupus—"

"If you go on like this," said Mrs. Trumpington, "I'm going to bed."

Mr. Behrens apologized, and said, "Tell us what you've planned for tomorrow."

"We're going to take coffee at the Deanery. There's a bring-and-buy sale in the afternoon. I'll let you off that. And we're having tea with Marjorie and Albert Rivers —although I don't expect he'll be there. They have that cottage just outside Harnham Gate. He's one of the top scientists out at Porton and she's a bridge fanatic."

"Not a fanatic, my dear. An expert. That's something quite different."

"They're both very good, anyway. No one round here will take them on any more."

"When people say that," said Mr. Behrens, "it usually means they think they're a bit sharp."

"No. Nothing like that. They're simply above our standard. They're both county players. Indeed I'm told that if Marjorie Rivers had the time to devote to it she might

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be an international player."

"A scientist and a bridge international," said Mr. Behrens. "They sound like an interesting couple."

"If there's one thing I can't abide," said Mrs. Wort, "it's rabbits. Rabbits and rats. They're both vermin. And as for *eating* them—"

"I'm not very fond of them myself," admitted Mr. Calder. "It was Rasselas who insisted on catching them. I should bury them, and forget about it."

The great dog was stretched out in front of the fire, his amber eyes half shut, the tip of his tail twitching.

"I declare," said Mrs. Wort, "I think he understands every word you say. And isn't he enjoying his holiday! The Plain was a grand place for dogs, before the Army messed it up. I remember the time, when I was a girl, there wasn't a soldier in sight. Just a few airmen, in what they called the Balloon School. Now you can't move for 'em."

"You can't indeed," said Mr. Calder. He was as relaxed as Rasselas, full length in an armchair as old and faded and comfortable as everything in the farmhouse kitchen. "I ran into them myself this afternoon. And *I* nearly got run into by a high-spirited female on a horse."

"Swore at you, did she?"

"That's right."

"Then it'd be Missus King-Bassett. Keeps a riding stable out at Hurley Bottom, and kennels, and runs the farm. You know what they call her, up at the Camp? The merry widow."

"Then Mr. King-Bassett is dead?"

"*If* he ever existed."

"I see," said Mr. Calder. "*If* he ever existed. That sort of widow. How long's she been here?"

"She bought the place—oh—three, four years ago. When old man Rudd died. She's pulled it up too. She's a good farmer, they say."

"It's a lonely sort of spot."

Mrs. Wort sniffed, and said, "*She's* not lonely. Not if half the stories you hear are true. There was a Major from Larkhill, made a perfect fool of himself over her. Married too. Now he's been sent abroad. So it's off with the old and on with the new."

"And who's the new?"

"I wouldn't know, and I wouldn't care. There's a lot of men to choose from round here. Soldiers and airmen, and all the scientists at Porton. They say the scientists are the worst of the lot. Would you be wanting anything more?"

"Not a thing," said Mr. Calder sleepily. "As soon as I can bring myself to stir from this beautiful fire, I'll be toddling up to bed."

When Mrs. Wort had departed, on her nightly round of locking up, he sat for a long time, staring into the red heart of the fire, and

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wondering why an attractive and capable woman should hide herself away in the wilds of Salisbury Plain...

"I'm sorry Albert couldn't be here this afternoon," said Marjorie Rivers. "They're keeping him very busy out at Porton just now. Some new gas, I think. He doesn't talk to me about his work. Most of it's secret, anyway."

She was a thick, competent-looking, gray-haired woman who reminded Mr. Behrens of the matron at his preparatory school.

"I was telling Mr. Behrens," said Canon Trumpington, "what a formidable record you and your husband had established at the bridge table."

"Are you a player, Mr. Behrens?"

"I'm a rabbit. What I really enjoy about the game is the curious psychological kinks it throws up. I played with a man once who would do *anything* to avoid bidding spades."

"That must have been rather limiting. Did you find out why?"

"I discovered, in the end, that he stuttered very badly on the letter 's'."

Marjorie Rivers gave a sudden guffaw, and said, "You're making the whole thing up. Another cup of tea, Mrs. Trumpington? Mind you, I agree with you about psychology. Albert's a scientist, you know."

"And a very distinguished one," said the Canon politely.

"Oh, I wasn't talking about his work. I meant, at the bridge table. He counts points, adds them up, calculates the probability factor, applies the appropriate formula, presses a button in his head, and expects the answer to come out. And so it might, if the players were automata. But they aren't. They're human beings. Now I play by instinct, and I think I get better results."

"I entirely agree," said Mr. Behrens. "I'd back instinct every time."

"Are you in Salisbury for long?"

"The Trumpingtons are kindly putting up with me for a few days."

"We have a little bridge club. Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, at half-past two. Would you care to come along tomorrow?"

"It's quite safe," said Mrs. Trumpington. "Most of us are beginners. I shall be there."

"I can't manage tomorrow, I'm afraid. I have to run up to London. But I might come along on Friday."

"We'll look forward to it," said Marjorie Rivers with what seemed to Mr. Behrens to be rather a grim smile. Or maybe it was his imagination. He carried the question up to London with him on the following day and propounded it to Mr. Fortescue, the manager of the Westminster Branch of the London and Home Counties Bank.

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Mr. Fortescue said, "She is certainly a remarkable woman. A top-class bridge player, with the sort of mind which that implies. A competent linguist in half a dozen languages, and the holder of very left-wing views which, to do her justice, she makes no attempt to conceal. But whether she, or her husband, or both of them are traitors is the precise matter which you and Calder have to decide."

"There *is* a leak, then?"

"That is one fact which had been established beyond any reasonable doubt. And it was confirmed by this outbreak at Al-Maza."

"I never really believed in that cholera. What was it?"

"It was the delayed effects of a prototype form of dianthromine."

"Remember, please," said Mr. Behrens, "that you're talking to someone whose scientific education never got beyond making a smell with sulphureted hydrogen."

"Dianthromine is a nonlethal gas. It is light and odorless, and it freezes the nerve centers of the brain, causing sudden and complete unconsciousness which lasts from four to six hours and then wears off without any side effects."

"That sounds like a fairly humane sort of weapon."

"Yes. Unfortunately the prototype had a delayed side effect which did not become apparent for some days. The subject went mad and, in most cases, died."

"How many people did we kill at Porton?"

"We killed a number of rats and guinea pigs. Then the defect was traced and eliminated."

"I see," said Mr. Behrens. "Yes. How very unfortunate. It was the experimental type that our traitor transmitted to Egypt?"

"It would appear so."

"The traitor being Albert Rivers?"

"That's an assumption. He was one of four men with the necessary technical knowledge. And his security clearance is low. So low that I think it was a mistake to let him work at Porton at all. He's a compulsive drinker and is known to be having affairs with at least two women in the neighborhood. He's also living well above his means."

"If it's him, how does he get the stuff out?"

"That is the interesting point. He would appear to have devised an entirely novel method."

Mr. Behrens said, "Do you think it could be his wife? She goes abroad a good deal—bridge congresses and things like that."

"It was one of the possibilities, but the Al-Maza incident proved it wrong. Porton knew about the side effects of dianthromine at the beginning of August. We must assume that Rivers would have transmitted a warning as quickly as he could. Yet the fatalities in Egypt did not occur until the third week

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in August. By the end of the month they, too, had corrected the defect."

"So we're looking for a message which takes two or three weeks to get through. It sounds like a letter to a safe intermediary."

"His post has been very carefully checked."

"Radio?"

"Too fast. He'd have got the news out before the trouble occurred."

"Some form of publication—in code. A weekly or fortnightly periodical?"

"I think that sounds more like it," said Mr. Fortescue. "You'll have to find out what the method is. And you'll have to stop it. There are some things going on at Porton now which we would certainly *not* want the Egyptians to know about. Or anyone else, for that matter."

"I'll have a word with Harry Sands-Douglas. He knows as much about codes and ciphers as anyone in England. I can probably catch him at the Dilly Club."

The Dons-in-London, known to its members as the Dilly, occupies two old houses in St. Johns Wood on the north side of Lords Cricket ground. It has the best cellar and the worst food in London, and a unique collection of classical pornography, bequeathed to it by the Warden of an Oxford College.

Mr. Behrens found it very useful, since he could be sure of meeting there former colleagues from that group of temporary Intelligence operatives who had come, in 1939, from the older Universities and the Bar, had created one of the most unorthodox and effective Intelligence Organizations in the world, and had returned in 1945 to their former professions—to the unconcealed relief of their more hidebound professional colleagues.

"The idea which occurred to me," said Mr. Behrens, "was that you might conceal a code in a bridge column."

Harry Sands-Douglas, huge, pink-faced, with a mop of fluffy white hair, considered the suggestion. He said, "Whereabouts in the column? In the hands themselves?"

"That's what I thought. Every self-respecting bridge column contains two or three sample hands."

Old Mr. Happold said, "Most ingenious, Behrens. What put you onto it?"

"Rivers and his wife are both bridge fiends. It's become the rage of Salisbury—so much so that the local paper now runs a bridge column. A *weekly* bridge column, you'll note. If, as I rather suspect, one of the Riverses is contributing it—"

Sands-Douglas had been making some calculations on the back of the menu. He said, "It'd be a devilish difficult code to break."

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"I thought nowadays you simply used a computer."

"You talk about using a computer as if it was a can opener," said Sands-Douglas. "It hadn't occurred to you, I suppose, that you'd have to program it first. The fifty-two cards in a pack can be arranged—in how many ways, Happold?"

"One hundred and sixty-five billion billion—that is, approximately. We shall have to do something about this claret."

"It's the 1943. The only wartime vintage they produced in the Medoc."

"I expect the vignerons had other things to think about in 1943," agreed Mr. Happold. "It's our fault. We should have drunk it at least ten years ago. What were we talking about?"

"Bridge," said Mr. Behrens. "The possible permutations and combinations of a pack of cards."

"A large computer probably *could* deal with that number. But there's a snag. I don't suppose your chap is sending code messages every week?"

"Almost certainly not. Half a dozen times a year probably. He'd key the column in some way—put an agreed word or expression into the first paragraph so that they'd know a code was coming."

"Exactly. So if we took, say, fifty-two examples and fed them into a computer, with instructions to detect any repeated correlations between the cards in the hand and known alphabetical and numerical frequencies in the English language and the mathematics of physics—which is roughly how it would have to be done, if you follow me—"

"I didn't understand a word of it," said Mr. Behrens. "But go on." He was sipping the claret. It was quite true: gradually, imperceptibly over the years, it had built up to maturity, had climbed from maturity to supermaturity, and was now descending into gentle ineffectiveness. "Like us," thought Mr. Behrens sadly.

"If only ten percent of your examples were true," said Sands-Douglas, "and the others weren't examples at all, but only blinds, even a giant computer would turn white-hot and start screaming."

"Is that true?" said Mr. Happold. "I've often wondered. If you abuse a computer, *does* it really start screaming?"

"Certainly. It's only human!"

"I'm sorry I can't be more definite," said Mr. Calder to Colonel Crofter, "and I do appreciate the awkward position it puts *you* in—as head of the department and Albert Rivers' boss."

"And it's really only suspicion."

"Most security work starts like that. Something out of the ordinary—"

"Rivers isn't ordinary. I grant you that. Very few of our scien-

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tists are. They've most of them got their little peculiarities. I suppose it's the price you have to pay for exceptional minds. All the same, *if* it's true it's got to be stopped. The stuff we're working on now is a damned sight more dangerous than One-to-Ten."

"One-to-Ten?"

"That's our laboratory name for dianthromine. It's not instantaneous. If I gave you a whiff of it, and counted slowly, you'd go out as I reached ten. That's one of its attractions. Imagine a commando raid on enemy headquarters. One of our chaps lets off the stuff in the guard room. Until they start dropping, they'd have no idea anything was wrong. And when they did catch on, it'd be too late to do anything about it."

"Commandos! It's light enough to be carried around then?"

"Oh, certainly." Colonel Crofter unlocked a steel cabinet in the corner and pulled out something that looked like a small fire extinguisher. "A man could carry two or three of these in a pack. And it's very simple to operate. Just point it, and pull the trigger. Only don't, because it's loaded."

"Fascinating," said Mr. Calder. "Useful bit of kit for a burglar, too." He handed it back with some reluctance. Colonel Crofter locked it away, and said, "Just what are you planning to do next?"

"We're looking for the outlet—the line of communication. For a start we'll have to investigate both his girl friends."

"Both? I only knew about one."

"He's running two at the moment. One's called Doris. She's the wife of an Air Force W.O. at Boscombe Down. The other's Mrs. King-Bassett."

"Yes," said Colonel Crofter. "The merry widow. Quite a character."

"You know her?"

"I know of her," said the Colonel, with some reserve.

"She seems to have had a succession of boy friends in the stations round here. A Major Dunstable at Larkhill, a Captain Strong from the Defensive Weapons Establishment at Netheravon, a light-haired subaltern from the 23rd Field Regiment whom I spoke to the other day— I'm not sure about him yet, so I won't mention his name. And Albert Rivers."

Colonel Crofter said, "H'm—ha. Yes." He turned on his stupid-soldier look for a moment, thought better of it, and became his normal shrewd self. He said, "Have you met Rivers?"

"Not yet. Deliberately."

"When you're ready to meet him I can arrange it. We have a guest night every Friday. Nothing chi-chi. We're a civilian establishment. But we observe the decencies—black tie. Why don't you come along?"

"When I'm ready," said Mr. Calder, "I'd like to do just that."

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After lunch at Mrs. Wort's, Mr. Calder grabbed a stick and set out once again for Hurley Bottom Farm. Rasselas cantered ahead of him, tail cocked. The weather was clearer, ominously so, with the wind swinging round to the north, and great cloud galleons were scudding across the sky.

As he approached the farm Rasselas spotted a chicken and gave a short derisive bark. The chicken squawked. A deeper baying note answered.

"That sounds like the opposition," said Mr. Calder. They rounded the corner and saw the farmhouse and outbuildings. A big, rather top-heavy Alsatian gave tongue from behind the farmhouse gate. Rasselas trotted up to the gate and sat down with his head on one side. The Alsatian jumped up at the top bar of the gate, scrabbled at it, failed to clear it, and fell back. Rasselas said "Fatty," in dog langugage. The Alsatian's barking become hysterical.

Sheila King-Bassett added her voice to the tumult.

"Call that bloody dog off, or there'll be trouble."

"Good evening," said Mr. Calder.

"I said, call that dog off."

"And I said, good evening."

Mrs. King-Bassett looked baffled.

"Don't worry. They're only exchanging compliments. Yours is saying, 'Come through that gate and I'll eat you.' Mine's saying, 'Be your age, sonny. Don't start something you can't finish.' They won't fight."

"You seem damned certain about it."

"Open the gate and see."

"All right. But don't blame me if—well, I'm damned. That's the first time I've seen *that* happen."

The two dogs had approached each other, until their noses were almost touching. Rasselas had said something, very low down in his throat, and the Alsatian had turned away, and sat down, and started to scratch himself.

"It's probably the first time his bluff's been called," said Mr. Calder.

Mrs. King-Bassett transferred her attention abruptly from the dogs to Mr. Calder and said, "Come inside. I want to talk to you."

She led the way into the front room of the farmhouse and said, "What's your tipple? And, incidentally, what's your game?"

"Whiskey," said Mr. Calder, "and croquet."

Mrs. King-Bassett gave vent to a sort of unwilling half guffaw, somewhere deep down in her throat. It was not at all unlike the noise Rasselas had made. She said, "I've seen you walking round a good deal with that dog of yours. And using a pair of field glasses. What are you? Some sort of security guard?"

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"Sort of, you might say."

"And who are you watching?"

"This may be a bit embarrassing," said Mr. Calder slowly. He took a long sip of the whiskey. It was good whiskey. "The man I'm chiefly interested in is, I think, by way of being a friend of yours. Albert Rivers."

Mrs. King-Bassett spat, with force and accuracy, into a vase of ferns in the fireplace. "That's what I think of Albert Rivers," she said. "And if he was here I'd spit in his face."

"What—?"

"He's a slimy, parsimonious two-timer and no friend of mine. If he comes near here again, Prince has got orders to take the seat out of his trousers. And he will."

"But—"

"Look. I didn't mind him inviting himself round here every other day. I didn't mind him drinking all my whiskey. I could even put up with him talking a lot of scientific mishmash—God, how he talked. Talk and drink was all he ever did. All right. But when it comes to trying to run *me* in double harness with a bloody airman's wife—"

"Not very tactful."

"And *if* you're now telling me that he's a damned Russian spy, and you're planning to run him in, all I can say is, bloody good show. In fact, come to think of it, I might be able to help you. Some of what he told me about his work-nerve gasses and all that stuff. I can't remember all the details, but I'm pretty sure it was against the Official Secrets Act. What are those damned dogs up to now? Fighting again?"

"I'm afraid they're *both* chasing your chickens."

Mrs. Trumpington put her head round the door after breakfast next morning and told Mr. Behrens that his Bank Manager wanted him on the telephone.

"I expect it's your overdraft," she said. "Mine's quite out of hand these days."

Mr. Fortescue said, "There's some news from Porton which I thought you ought to have. It came to me from the Defence Ministry this morning. They've had a burglary. Someone broke into Colonel Crofter's office last night and stole a fully charged cylinder of dianthromine."

"Why on earth would anyone do that?"

"I've no idea," said Mr. Fortescue. He sounded techy. "You and Calder are the men on the spot. You'd be more likely to know than I would. I think it's time you two got together over this. You've been operating at different ends long enough. Get together."

"I'll arrange a rendezvous," said Mr. Behrens. "Before I ring off, could you pass on a message to Harry Sands-Douglas? The Dilly Club will be able to find him.

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Tell him that I think I've located the key to the Bridge articles. The hot ones have all got a reference to 'science' or 'scientists' in the third sentence."

"I suppose he'll understand what you're talking about?"

"He'll understand," said Mr. Behrens, and hung up.

After that he did some complicated telephoning, had lunch at the Haunch of Venison, and wandered slowly back, along the High Street, under the crenelated gate and into the Close. Ahead of him loomed the bulk of the Cathedral, like a gray whale asleep in the sun. A pair of falcons, male and female, were flirting in the air currents round the top of the spire.

Mr. Behrens entered the precincts and made his way to the seat by the west front. Mr. Calder was already there. Rasselas was flat on the turf beside him.

Mr. Behrens said, "The old man wanted me to find out how things were going at your end. He's had no report from you for forty-eight hours."

"I've been busy. Clearing the ground. I don't think either of Rivers' girl friends is involved. I'm on rather good terms now with Mrs. King-Bassett."

"How did you fix that?"

"I sent her an anonymous letter, giving her the ripest details of Albert's liaisons with the Sergeant Major's wife at Boscombe Down. Then I called on her, with Rasselas. We all got on together famously."

"I don't think," said Mr. Behrens, "that he's using either woman as a courier. In fact, I'm pretty certain that we know how he *is* doing it."

"Through the bridge columns?"

"Yes. I had a telephone message after lunch. There's a positive correlation. They should have the code finally broken by this evening. I gather the old man is already thinking about how to use it. He had the idea of sending them out something pretty horrific to try out next."

"*If* the messages are going out through this bridge column, does it mean that his wife's in it too?"

Mr. Behrens paused before answering this. He seemed to be wholly engrossed in watching the falcons. The male had spiraled up to a height above the female and now plummeted down in mock attack. The female sidestepped at the last moment; the male put on the brakes and volplaned down almost to the transept roof.

"No," said Mr. Behrens at last. "I don't. For two reasons. First, because it's Albert Rivers who writes the bridge columns. His wife has no hand in them. I've found that out. By itself, it's not conclusive. But it was a remark by her, about Albert being a scientist, which put me onto the key to the cipher. If she'd been guilty, she'd never have done that."

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"It seems to me," said Mr. Calder, "that *if* we pull in Albert Rivers, simply on the basis of the code messages, we may be in for rather a sticky run. Fancy trying to persuade an average jury that something a computer has worked out on the basis of a few bridge hands constitutes treason."

Mr. Behrens said, "I once knew a Baconian. He was convinced that all Shakespeare's plays were full of code messages. He demonstrated to me, very cleverly, that if you applied his formula to Hamlet's soliloquy, 'To be or not to be,' you could produce the sentence: 'F.B. made me for Q.E.'; which meant, of course, 'Francis Bacon wrote the play for Queen Elizabeth'."

"Of course."

"Sands-Douglas applied the same formula to a later speech and produced the message: 'Arsenal for ye cuppe'."

Mr. Calder laughed. Then he stopped laughing and said, "I've got a feeling we may have to consider an alternative solution."

"Was that why you broke into Colonel Crofter's office and stole the dianthromine?"

"How do you know I stole it?"

"It had to be either you or Rivers. You were the only two disreputable characters in the neighborhood. He had no need to steal it. He could have got some legitimately. So it must have been you."

"What a nasty horrible mind you've got," said Mr. Calder.

Albert Rivers leaned back in his chair in the mess anteroom, lit a cigarette which he extracted from a pack, and returned the pack to his pocket. As an afterthought he took it out again and offered it to the two men sitting with him. Both shook their heads.

"You're a civilian yourself, Corker," he said.

"It's Calder, actually."

"Calder. I beg yours. I never remember a name for five minutes. Never forget a formula, but never remember a name."

"Perhaps that's because formulas are often more important than names."

Rivers squinted at Mr. Calder, as though he suspected the remark of some deep double meaning, then laughed, and said, "You're damned right they are. What was I saying?"

"You were pointing out that I was a civilian. I imagine that goes for the majority of the people here, too." As he said this Mr. Calder looked round the room. Most of the diners had disappeared to their own quarters, but there was a hard core left. Four were playing bridge with silent concentration. Two younger men were drinking beer. A man with a beard was finishing a crossword puzzle and a large port.

"That's just my point. Why do we have to confuse scientific re-

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search and the para-paraphernalia of military life? All that nonsense after dinner—sitting round for half an hour in our best bibs and tuckers, drinking port, when we'd all rather be down at the local, or enjoying a bit of slap and tickle in the car park."

"Really, Rivers," said Colonel Crofter. "I don't think—"

"That's all right, Colonel. You can't shock old Corker. I've seen him sneaking off down to Hurley Bottom Farm. Lechery Lodge, we call it round here. What do you think of the merry widow, Corker?"

Mr. Calder appeared untroubled by this revelation. He said, "I had a very interesting talk with Mrs. King-Bassett."

"I bet. Did she tell you she thought I was a prize skunk?"

"Yes."

Albert Rivers burst into a hearty guffaw of laughter which drew glances of disapproval from the bridge players.

"That's what I like about you, Corker. You tell the truth. Waiter!... What's your tipple, Corker?"

"Scotch and water."

"And yours, Colonel?"

"Nothing more for me, thank you."

"Oh, come along, Colonel. It won't do you any harm. Bring us three large whiskies. In fact, it'll save a lot of time in the long run if you bring the bottle."

"Bring the bottle, sir?"

"The bottle, Moxon. The whole bottle, and nothing but the bottle."

The waiter shot a sideways look at Colonel Crofter, but getting no help there, pottered off. Albert Rivers stretched himself even more comfortably in his chair and prepared to ride one of his favorite hobby horses. "As I was saying, it always seems odd to me that we have to mix up militarism and science."

"This happens," said Colonel Crofter, "to be a military establishment."

"Sure, Colonel. But you don't parade your scientists in the morning." Rivers threw his head back and roared out, "Scientists form fours. By the right. Quick march."

One of the bridge players said angrily, "This is impossible. We'll have to move." They carried the table and chairs into the next room as Moxon arrived with the whiskey.

The two beer drinkers had left and the port drinker had fallen asleep over his crossword. Mr. Calder knew very well that if he himself made the least move to depart, Colonel Crofter would take himself off as well. As long as he stayed, the Colonel, as his host, had to stay too. He watched Rivers pouring out the drinks. A double for each of them, and pretty nearly half a tumblerful for himself. Mr. Calder reckoned that this one would do the trick.

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"Let's face it, Colonel," said Rivers. "Cheers! Let's face it. You can't conduct scientific research by numbers. Science can't be drilled, or court-martialed." He had added a little water, and now knocked back nearly half the contents of the glass in three gulps. "Science is universal, and international."

"I hope you're bearing in mind," said Colonel Crofter, "that you've got to drive home tonight."

"I've got my car trained. It finds its own way home. What was I saying?"

Mr. Calder said, "You were telling us that science was international."

"I wonder why I said that?"

"At a guess, you were going to say that since science was international it no longer observes national boundaries. That the days when nations conducted their own private, selfish scientific research were over, and that the results of one should be freely communicated to all."

The room was very quiet. Rivers seemed to be thinking. The cool and cautious part of his mind was fighting with the fumes of the whiskey. Colonel Crofter sat watching him, his gray eyes wary.

Rivers said, "I don't think I like you, Corker."

"That makes it mutual."

"You're a crafty old buzzard. You've been leading me on. I'm going home."

"It's time we all went home," said the Colonel. They got up. Rivers seemed to be steady enough.

"You're not going to waste that lovely drink, surely," said Mr. Calder.

Rivers glared at him, picked the glass up, swallowed what was left in it, and put it back where he thought the table was. The glass fell on the carpet, without breaking. While the Colonel was picking up the glass, Mr. Calder moved to the door. He didn't appear to hurry, but he wasted no time. He had something to do.

Rivers' car was parked in front of his. It was pitch-dark, and he had to work quickly, making no mistakes. First he took some things out of his own car, went back to Rivers' car, then back to his own car, then back to the front steps again.

He was standing there buttoning up his overcoat when Rivers and the Colonel came out. Rivers was his jaunty self again. He said, "Good night, Colonel. Up guards and at 'em, as Wellington didn't say at the battle of Waterloo. Good night, Corker, you crafty old buzzard."

"He's not often as bad as this," said the Colonel apologetically.

"Don't apologize. It was a most enlightening evening."

"Do you think I ought to have let him take that last drink?"

"He had so much alcohol in his bloodstream already that I don't suppose it made any difference."

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"He's got to get home." They heard the car start up. "Luckily it's a fairly straight road." The car started to move. "And there isn't likely to be a lot of traffic about."

"One," said Mr. Calder softly, "two, three, four."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Five, six, seven."

"Watch that ditch—"

"Eight, nine."

"Slow down, you bloody fool! He'll never—"

"Ten."

There was an appalling crash. The Colonel and Mr. Calder started to run.

"At the adjourned inquest," said the news commentator "on the well-known scientist and bridge player, Albert Rivers, Inspector Walsh said that, in view of the evidence that the car drove straight out into the main road without making any attempt to slow down, he could only surmise that at some stage Rivers had completely lost consciousness. Inquiries are still proceeding. A further outbreak has been reported from the Egyptian Military Research Station at Al-Maza. Victims include the Director, Professor Fawazi. Among other alarming symptoms he has lost all the hair on his body, and his skin has wrinkled and turned bright yellow—"

"For goodness' sake," said Mrs. Trumpington, "turn it off."

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